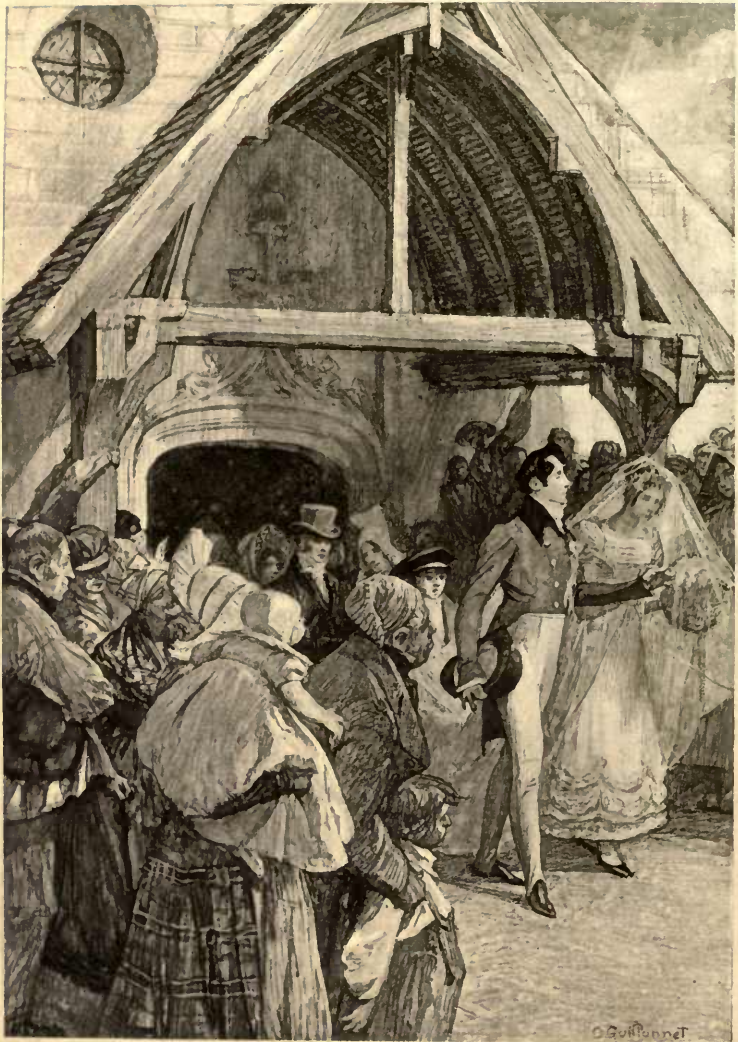


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O. Guillonnet

THE MILKMAID'S WEDDING

Denise, beaming with love and happiness, embellishing by her charms and her grace the modest costume she had selected, was led to the altar by the man she loved.

All the people of the village assembled to see the little milkmaid married.

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME XX

THE MILKMAID
OF
MONTFERMEIL

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THE MILKMAID OF MONTFERMEIL

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I

A CONVERSATION IN A CABRIOLET

"For you can't go on like this forever, lieutenant—you must agree to that. The great Turenne didn't fight ten battles at once and didn't carry on six intrigues on the same day."

"No, my dear Bertrand, but Cæsar dictated four letters at once in four different languages, and Pico de la Mirandola boasted that he was familiar with and could talk *de omni re scibili*——"

"I beg pardon, lieutenant, I don't know Latin."

"That means that he claimed to know all languages, to have gone to the bottom of all the sciences, to be able to refute all creeds and reconcile theologians of all breeds."

"As I don't think that you're so conceited as that, lieutenant, I won't compare you with this Monsieur de la Mirandola, who claimed to know everything. As for Cæsar, I've heard him spoken of as a very great man, but I'm sure he didn't have as many mistresses as you."

"You're mistaken, Bertrand; the great men of antiquity had a great many female slaves, concubines, and often cast off their wives and took new ones. Love and Pleasure had temples in Greece; and those high and

mighty Romans, who are represented to us as so strait-laced, weren't ashamed to indulge in the wildest debauchery, to crown themselves with myrtle and roses, and sometimes to appear at their banquets in the costumes of our first parents."

"For God's sake, lieutenant, let's drop the Romans, with whom I never exchanged a shot, and go back to what we were talking about."

"I propose to prove to you, my dear Bertrand, that we are very far from surpassing preceding generations in folly, and are in fact much more virtuous."

"Is that why you have four mistresses?"

"I love women, I admit; I will say more—I am proud of it; it is a natural inclination. I cannot see an attractive face, a fine pair of eyes, without feeling a pleasant thrill, an agitation, an I don't know what, in short, that proves my extreme susceptibility. Is it a crime, pray, to be susceptible in an age when selfishness is carried to such lengths; when self-interest is the mainspring of almost all human actions; when we see authors prefer cash to renown, and men in office forgetful of everything except retaining their offices, instead of meditating on the good they might do; when we see artists begging for the patronage of people they despise, and asking alms from stupidity when it is in power; when we see men of letters carefully block a confrère's path when they detect in him a talent that might outshine theirs; when, in short, every door is closed to obscure merit, and thrown wide open to impudence and conceit when accompanied by wealth? If selfishness had not wormed its way into all classes of society, if love of money had not replaced love of one's neighbor, would it be thus? And you berate me for my susceptibility! You reproach me for being unable to listen unmoved to the story of a noble deed,

or of pathetic misfortune; for giving money to people who deceive me; for allowing myself to be gulled like an ass by the palaver of a child who tells me that he is begging for his mother, or of a poor laboring man who swears that he has no work and nothing to eat! Well, my dear Bertrand, I prefer my susceptibility to their icy selfishness, and I find in my heart sources of enjoyment which their indifferent hearts will never know."

This conversation took place in a stylish cabriolet, drawn by a prancing horse, which was bowling along the lovely road from Raincy to Montfermeil. A small groom of some twelve or fourteen years was perched behind the carriage, in which Bertrand was seated beside a young man, dressed in the latest fashion, who, as he conversed, touched occasionally with his whip the spirited steed he was driving.

Bertrand had partly turned his face away toward the end of his master's speech; and to cloak the emotion which was beginning to be too much for him, he blew his nose and took a huge pinch of snuff. Somewhat composed thereby, he said in a voice slightly tremulous with emotion:

"God forbid, lieutenant, that I should blame you for being tender-hearted! I know your kind heart; I know how willing and ready to help you are! And I could mention a thousand things you've done that many men would have bragged about; whereas you are very careful to conceal them."

"People who boast of the good they do are like the ones who offer you a thing in such a way that you can't accept it: both give regretfully."

"We needn't look very far, lieutenant; haven't you heaped presents on me? didn't you take me in, and give me board and lodging?"

"You're an idiot, Bertrand; don't you act as my steward, factotum, confidential man of business,—yes, and as my friend, which is better than all the rest, and for which one cannot pay?"

At that, Bertrand turned his head altogether, and blew his nose again, because a great tear had dropped from his eyes. He took two pinches of snuff, and having warmly grasped the hand that his master offered him, he said in a quavering voice:

"Yes, monsieur, you are the best of men; you have a thousand good qualities! and no one had better say anything different in my hearing! Morbleu! my sword isn't rusty yet."

"Oho! so now you're going to flatter me, are you? Remember, Bertrand, that you began this conversation for the purpose of scolding me."

"Scolding you! no, indeed, lieutenant, but simply to point out to you that it would be more reasonable to love one woman at once; with full liberty to change as soon as you see another one that you like better."

"Look you, Bertrand, I'll draw a comparison for you, that you'll see the justice of at once."

"You won't put any Greeks or Romans in it, will you, lieutenant?"

"Not one.—You like wine, don't you, Bertrand?"

"That's so, lieutenant; I admit that an old bottle—of a good brand—there's nothing like that to liven you up!"

"Do you like beaune?"

"Very much, lieutenant."

"And bordeaux?"

"Ah, yes! it smells of violets; it has a delicious bouquet!"

"And volnay?"

"I've never been able to resist it."

"And chambertin?"

"I would go down on my knees to it, lieutenant."

"If you had a bottle of each of those wines in front of you, would you give up three of them and drink just a single one?"

"I promise you, lieutenant, that I'd take care of all four of them, and I wouldn't be any worse off for it either."

"Why then do you expect me, when I am surrounded by four pretty creatures, each of whom has some peculiar charm, to give up three of them and make love to only one?"

"Parbleu! that's true enough, lieutenant; you can't do it; you must drink them—I mean you must love them all four; and I see now that I was wrong."

The discussions between Bertrand and Auguste Dalville almost always ended so. Auguste was twenty-seven and had twenty thousand francs a year; his father died while he was in the cradle, and his mother was taken away from him six years before our story opens. That was the date of the beginning of Auguste's life of dissipation; he had sought distraction from his perfectly natural grief, and had finally become unable to resist a sex in whose company he had at first sought diversion only.

Meanwhile, the ambition to wear a handsome uniform, and perhaps to earn a pair of epaulets, had led Auguste to enter the army. The country was at peace; but a young man with a good education does not remain a private. Auguste, promoted to sub-lieutenant, delighted to listen to Bertrand, who had served as corporal of *voltigeurs*, and had been at Austerlitz, Eylau, and Friedland. Bertrand was only forty-four: he put into the

description of his battles the same fire and zeal that he had displayed in the battles themselves, and Auguste never tired of listening. The corporal's stories excited his ardor; he regretted that he was not born a few years earlier, thinking that he might, like Bertrand, have taken part in those triumphant campaigns which will always be the glory of France.

About this time, Auguste was sent with his regiment to Pampeluna, to which the French were laying siege. Bertrand found himself under the command of the young officer, who had been made a lieutenant. But, the war at an end, Auguste quitted the military profession, and returned to Paris, to abandon himself afresh to his taste for pleasure. He proposed to Bertrand to go with him; he readily obtained his discharge and accompanied Dalville, to whom he was sincerely attached, and whom he continued to call lieutenant, partly from habit and partly from choice.

Bertrand had a mother in Paris, very old and infirm. Auguste's first care was to settle on the poor woman a pension which placed her beyond fear of want, and enabled her to enjoy in her old age a multitude of comforts which she had never known during her life of toil and misfortune.

Thereafter Auguste was not simply a master in Bertrand's eyes; he regarded him as his benefactor, and his affection and devotion knew no bounds. After his mother's death, which occurred three years later, Bertrand attached himself to Auguste's service altogether, and vowed that he would devote his life to proving his gratitude. Bertrand had had no education; he often made blunders in delivering the messages which his master entrusted to him; but Auguste always forgave him, because he was well aware of the ex-corporal's

attachment and his good heart. Bertrand, as we have seen, sometimes ventured to remonstrate with his superior officer, because, being as yet unfamiliar with the manner of life in high society, Auguste's follies terrified him, and he was in constant dread that his intrigues would lead to serious complications; but Auguste always succeeded in allaying Bertrand's fright, so that the latter invariably ended the conversation by saying: "I was in the wrong."

There are many more things that I might tell you concerning the two men who have been talking together. Perhaps I ought to draw their portraits for you, and to tell you to just what type of face Auguste Dalville's belonged. But what would be the use? Doubtless some one of his numerous conquests will have something to say about him; so that I should run the risk of unnecessary repetition by sketching him at first. We can simply presume that he was comely, as he was fortunate enough to please the ladies. "That is no reason," you will say; "when a man has twenty thousand francs a year, that takes the place of physical charms, and conceals ugliness."—Oh! what an idea, my dear readers! Surely no reader of the gentler sex would make such a reply; for I have too good an opinion of the ladies not to feel sure that it would take something more than twenty thousand francs to captivate them.

But the cabriolet is speeding along; we will resume our reflections at some other time.

"Bébelle goes very well. You are warm, lieutenant; don't you want me to take the reins?"

"No, I like to drive."

"We shall be at Monsieur Destival's by eleven o'clock."

"That is quite early enough; and from that time until five o'clock, when we dine—But I promised a long while ago. At all events, Madame Destival is an excellent

musician, and we will try to amuse ourselves while we are waiting for dinner."

"Why did you bring me, lieutenant? I can't play or sing, and as I don't belong in the salon, where am I to do sentry-duty?"

"Never fear; Monsieur Destival expressly requested me to bring you. He has become infatuated with hunting, and he wants you to teach him to handle a gun."

"Very well, lieutenant, I'll teach him all I know; that won't take long."

"Poor Virginie! What a rage she will be in to-night! I promised to take her to Feydeau——"

"She has often promised you things, and then broken her word."

"How do you know that, Bertrand?"

"Because I've heard, lieutenant, that Mademoiselle Virginie's a terrible liar."

"That is true; yes, I have had proofs of it more than once."

"That's very bad, after all that you've done for her! But you're so kindhearted, you always allow yourself to be imposed on! Ten thousand carbines! if the hussy had killed herself every time she threatened *to perish* because she didn't have enough to pay her rent——"

"Come, come, Monsieur Bertrand, be quiet! You have a wicked tongue.—Go on, Bébelle; I believe you're asleep."

"And one evening, when you went out, and she told me her troubles! She said that if she had had a weakness for you, it was because she was too loving, but that she was determined to change her ways, not to see you any more, and to make up with her aunt. For my part, I believed every word of it; in fact, she had such a sincere way of saying it, that I felt all ready to cry. But no

sooner did she learn that you were at the masked ball than she shouted: 'I'm going too, Bertrand! lend me some clothes, I'm going to dress as a man!'—'What, mademoiselle,' says I, 'when you're talking about being good and not seeing Monsieur Auguste any more!'—At that she began to laugh like a madwoman and called me an old turkey-cock! Faith, lieutenant, I don't understand a woman like that."

"I can well believe it, my poor Bertrand; even I myself don't understand her, and I know her better than you do."

"I like that little light-haired woman better; you know, lieutenant, the one you got acquainted with by carrying back the little poodle she'd lost, that I found lying at our door at night."

"You mean Léonie?"

"No, I mean Madame de Saint-Edmond."

"Léonie and Saint-Edmond are the same person."

"I didn't know, lieutenant."

"But look you, Bertrand, it was your fault that I made her acquaintance."

"The poodle's rather, lieutenant."

"Léonie lived in the same house with me, and I didn't know her."

"Parbleu, lieutenant, as if a body knew all his neighbors in Paris! except concierges and cooks, whose business it is."

"At all events, you found the dog, and I bade you ask the concierge if anyone in the house had lost it."

"And he told me that there was a young lady on the third floor, who had lain awake all night for grief at losing her dog, and that her maid, after searching from garret to cellar, had gone out to have placards printed offering thirty francs reward to whoever brought the

little beast back. I confess that I didn't have any idea that the little poodle, which did nothing but bite and growl, was worth more than four months' pay for a private soldier; but I went up to the third floor in a hurry, to have the order for the placards countermanded by giving the little beast back to its mistress. To celebrate his return, he began by scratching a handsome blue satin armchair and putting his paws in madame's cup of chocolate; but that didn't prevent her calling him her little jewel, and expressing the greatest gratitude to me. Still, lieutenant, I don't see anything in all that to force you to fall in love with Madame Léonie Saint-Edmond."

"You haven't told everything, Bertrand: you forget that, when you came down from the third floor, you drew a very alluring picture of that lady; you told me that she had a pair of eyes—and a voice—and a certain shape!"

"Bless me, lieutenant, I should say that all women have eyes and a shape and a voice!"

"Yes, to be sure; but still I was curious to know this young neighbor of ours, who showed such keen sensibility."

"And it would seem, lieutenant, that you dislodged the poodle, for since then Madame Saint-Edmond is forever at your heels; and as for me, madame questions me and tries to make me talk; she sends for me to come up when she's at breakfast, and as she offers me a little glass of malaga and a biscuit, she asks me where you passed the evening before."

"And Monsieur Bertrand, melted by the malaga, recounts my actions to my neighbor, I presume?"

"Oh! for shame, lieutenant! What do you take me for? The idea of my betraying my master's secrets!

If there had been half a dozen bottles of malaga in front of me, I wouldn't have said a word! To be sure, I don't like malaga."

"Bless my soul, my dear Bertrand, I am not scolding you! You know well enough that I make no secret of my follies, even to those who might have ground for complaint. It's a mere matter of an amourette or two, a little fooling."

"All the same, lieutenant, I am seriously embarrassed, on my word, being forever questioned by this one and that one. One calls me her little Bertrand, another her true friend—and these ladies are all very attractive——"

"Ah! monsieur le caporal has noticed that!"

"Parbleu, lieutenant, I have eyes just like other men, and if my heart don't take fire as easily as yours, that don't mean that it's invulnerable. And when I see one of those ladies put her handkerchief to her eyes, when I hear your neighbor throw herself into an armchair and say that she's going to faint; and when Mademoiselle Virginie cries that she *will perish*,—why, I don't know where I am. I run from one to the other, offer them salts and eau-de-vie, tear my hair, and sometimes I even cry with them. Let me tell you that I'd rather assault a fortress six times than be present at one of those scenes, on my honor!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Poor Bertrand!"

"Of course, you laugh; it don't make any difference to you how much you are called traitor, perfidious villain, savage, monster, cruel wretch!"

"Those are terms of endearment; in a young woman's mouth those words mean: 'You are charming, I love you, I adore you!'"

"Oho! so 'monster!' means 'you are charming,' does it? That makes a difference, lieutenant; I couldn't be

expected to guess that; now I understand. But these tears that you are responsible for—do they also mean that you are considered charming?”

“Oh! do you suppose, my old friend, that in love-affairs tears are always sincere?”

“In a great flood, lieutenant, there may happen to be one honest one; and it seems to me that a man ought to be sorry for the suffering he causes a pretty girl.”

“I promise to reform, Bertrand, to be more virtuous in the future! Is it possible that you think that I, who adore that charming sex, I, whose whole happiness depends on making myself attractive to the ladies—that I set about causing them pain?”

“No, lieutenant; on the contrary, I am well aware that you would like to give pleasure to all the young beauties you meet; but it is that very pleasure that leads to regret and cares; and you yourself—for, as I was saying just now, the great Turenne——”

Auguste had ceased to listen to Bertrand; he had put his head out of the window and was watching a young peasant who had just come out of the forest and was walking along the same road that our travellers were following, driving before her an ass laden with baskets, in which were a number of the tin cans in which milk is carried to the people of Paris by the village women.

As the ass did not move as fast as Bébelle, Auguste drew in his horse and made him walk, in order to see the girl as long as possible.

“Shall I touch Bébelle up?” asked Bertrand, surprised to find that they continued to go at a walk.

“No, no—she’s going well enough.”

“Yes, lieutenant, you will be very wise to turn virtuous—virtuous for you, I mean; if you don’t, your income won’t be enough to pay all your expenses. You have

appointed me your steward, so I can venture to talk figures with you; and, although I'm not a great mathematician, I can see plainly enough that when you're forever dipping into a cash-box, it is soon empty. This year you don't seem to be lucky at that infernal game you play so often—you know, lieutenant, the game in which you turn the kings——”

“Fresh complexion—a pretty figure—lovely eyes—it's extraordinary, I swear!”

“And then the cashmere shawls you send to one, and the milliner's bill that you pay for another——”

“And all these charms in a milkmaid!”

“What's that? a milkmaid? Do you mean to say that you pay their bills too, lieutenant?”

“Who in the devil said anything about bills? Just look at that sweet child on the road yonder.”

“Well! she's a milkmaid—that's the whole story!”

“You don't see how pretty she is. And that sly smile, every time her eyes turn in our direction.”

“Perhaps she wants to sell us some cream cheese?”

“Blockhead! to see nothing but cheese! I tell you that sackcloth waist, that double linen neckerchief, so high in the neck, conceal a multitude of treasures.”

“Treasures! treasures! Parbleu! one can guess very nearly what they conceal, although appearances are often deceitful. But such treasures aren't scarce; is it on account of the little milkmaid that we're going now like a load of flour?”

“No, no, it's because I am beginning to get tired of the cabriolet. The weather is so fine; I feel that it will do me good to walk. We're only a little way from Monsieur Destival's now. Here, Bertrand, take the reins; I'll do the rest of the distance on foot.”

“What, lieutenant, you mean to——”

Auguste had already stopped his horse; he jumped lightly to the ground despite Bertrand's grumbling, and said:

"Go on with Tony."

"But what shall I tell Monsieur Destival?"

"That I am coming; I shall be there as soon as you."

"But——"

"Bertrand, I insist."

Bertrand said no more; but he cast an angry glance at the little milkmaid, and lashed Bébelle, who soon left Auguste far behind.

II

THE FALL

The damsel went her way, with a branch of walnut in her hand, driving her ass before her, apparently oblivious of the fact that the young man had alighted from his cabriolet. She did not look back, but contented herself with calling out from time to time: "Go on there, White Jean;" and White Jean went none the faster.

Auguste soon overtook the milkmaid. He walked behind her a few moments, to examine her; she was well-built, so far as one could judge of her shape beneath the thick wrapper in which she was muffled; her foot was certainly small, although encased in heavy shoes, and her woolen stockings covered a shapely leg, which he could examine at his leisure, for a milkmaid wears very short skirts.

Auguste stepped forward; the girl looked up and seemed surprised to see the young man of the cabriolet

walking by her side. But she turned her head away, with another "go on!" to her ass, in which there was no touch of romance.

Our young exquisite gazed closely at the girl, who wore a cap perched on top of her head, which concealed none of her features.

"She is very pretty," he said to himself; "fine eyes, a pretty mouth, a complexion like the rose; but nothing extraordinary, after all. Her freshness is the freshness of a village girl; she's a mere country beauty, and I should have done as well to stay in the carriage. However, as I have alighted, I may as well try to gain something by it."

And the young man continued to stare at the milkmaid, with a smile on his face; but she, apparently annoyed by the fine gentleman's scrutiny, said to him sharply:

"Shall you soon be through looking at me?"

"Isn't it within the law to admire you?"

"No, I don't like to have anyone eye me like that."

"If you weren't so pretty, people would look at you less."

"If this is the way you talk to your ladies in Paris, you must have lots of faces in your head! When you look at a body so close, you'll know her again; but here among us, we don't call it decent; and you'd better not come here to play monkey tricks like this!"

"I made a mistake in leaving the cabriolet," thought Auguste. However, he continued to walk beside the girl, and said to her after a moment:

"Are you a milkmaid?"

"Pardi! anyone can see that. Have you just guessed it?"

"Will you sell me some milk?"

"I haven't got any."

"Do you carry it to Paris?"

"I don't go so far as that."

"Where do you come from?"

"You're very inquisitive."

The girl's tone was not encouraging, and Auguste looked along the road to see whether he could still see his cabriolet; but it had disappeared, for White Jean stopped very often to eat leaves or grass, despite the blows with the switch which his mistress bestowed on him.

"Do you know," said Auguste, "you are not very agreeable, my lovely child? You are so pretty that I thought you would be gentler, less savage."

"That's just it! monsieur thought he was going to turn my head with his flattery! But I'm used to meeting young men from Paris; it's always the same old song; they think they can make themselves welcome just by telling me I'm pretty! Oh! you're a parcel of flatterers! but I don't listen to you, you see!"

"I should like to hear anyone deny again that virtue has its home in the village!" said Auguste to himself. "It is clear enough to my mind that the country is the place where we find the pure morals of the ancient patriarch, the models of virtue celebrated by the poets, the—That devil of a Bertrand needn't have driven Bébelle so fast; he must have done it from pure mischief! And when I said that we were almost there I was lying. It's at least three-quarters of a league farther!"

To complete the young man's discomfiture, the milkmaid turned aside from the high road into a path that led through the woods. Auguste stood for a moment hesitating at the entrance to the path. Should he follow his cabriolet? or should he follow the girl? The first

course was the more sensible, and that was his reason no doubt for deciding in favor of the second.

The time that Auguste had passed in indecision had allowed the milkmaid to get some distance ahead of him; she walked along the path, and, thinking that the young man had followed the highroad, she sang as she drove White Jean in front of her:

“You love me, you say,
Then prove it, I pray;
But dandies like you,
Would hoax us, I know.”

“Very pretty! although the rhyme isn’t first-class,” said Auguste, quickening his pace to overtake the girl. She turned, and seemed surprised to see the young man in the path behind her.

“What! you coming this way?” said the milkmaid, in a somewhat uncertain voice.

“To be sure; this path is lovely.”

“Ain’t you going to overtake your carriage?”

“I couldn’t make up my mind to leave you.”

“Oh! you’re wasting your time, monsieur, and I promise you you’d do better to go after your carriage.”

“But I much prefer to walk by your side, although you treat me so harshly; however, I have an idea that you’re not so unkind as you choose to appear.”

“Well, you’re mistaken; I ain’t kind at all; ask all the young fellows in Montfermeil how I treat them when they try to fool. Oh! Denise Fourcy is well known here-about, I tell you.”

“Denise Fourcy? Good, now I know your name.”

“Well, what then? How does that put you ahead any?”

"It will help me to find out about you easily, and to find you again when I choose."

"Pardi! I ain't lost, and anyone can easily find me."

"Do you mean to say, Denise, that at your age, pretty as you are, you haven't a lover?"

"Is that any of your business?"

"Oh! very much!"

"Here in the country we ain't in such a hurry as your city ladies."

"Haven't women hearts in the country as well as elsewhere?"

"Yes; but they don't take fire the way yours does; it seems to me to be a little heart of tinder."

"Upon my word, she is really amusing!" said Auguste, laughingly.

"*She!*" repeated the milkmaid in an irritated tone; "how polite these fine gentlemen are! *She!* Anyone would think we had known each other a long while."

"It depends entirely on you whether or not we shall be the best friends in the world in a moment. And to begin with, I must give you a kiss."

"No—no, monsieur—none of that sort of thing, if you please.—Oh! look out, or I'll scratch you."

Auguste, accustomed to defy such prohibitions, seized the little milkmaid by the waist, and tried to put his lips to her fresh, ruddy cheek; but she defended herself more vigorously than the city ladies do; to be sure, a peasant is less embarrassed by her clothes, she isn't afraid of rumpling them, and her corsets are not so tight that she cannot move her arms; that is the reason no doubt that a kiss is much harder to obtain from a peasant.

The kiss was taken at last; but it cost Auguste dear, for he bore below his left eye the marks of two nails which had drawn blood from the Parisian dandy's face.

Thus each of the combatants was beaten, for each bore a token of defeat. But the war seemed not to be at an end. Denise, twice as red as she was before the battle, arranged her neckerchief, glaring angrily at the young man; while he put his hand to his face, and, finding blood there, wiped it with his handkerchief, looking at the girl with a less sentimental expression; for those two digs with her nails had cooled his ardor to an extraordinary degree.

"I'm glad of it," said the girl at last; "that will teach you to try to kiss a girl against her will, monsieur."

"I certainly didn't expect to be treated so. The idea of disfiguring me—just for a kiss!"

"If all women did the same, you wouldn't be so forward."

"Thank God, they don't all have the same ideas that you have. You hurt me terribly!"

"Oh! what troubles you the most is that it will show; you're afraid you won't be so pretty to look at."

"No, I assure you that that isn't what I am thinking about. I am sorry that I really made you angry. I realize that I was wrong. Come, Denise, let us make peace."

"No, monsieur, no, I don't listen to you any more."

And the milkmaid, thinking that the young man intended to try to kiss her again, ran to her donkey, and, in order to fly more rapidly, leaped on White Jean's back, and beat him with redoubled force. But it was the animal's custom to return placidly to the village, browsing on whatever he found by the roadside, and not to bear his young mistress on his back. Disturbed in his daily routine by this unexpected burden, White Jean broke into a fast trot, and entered the woods despite his mistress's efforts to make him follow the beaten path.

Auguste heard the girl's cries as she tried in vain to hold her steed, dodging with much difficulty the branches which brushed against her face every instant. Forgetting the marks that Denise had left on his cheek, Dalville followed the milkmaid's track, in order to lead the ass back into the path; but when he heard running behind him, the infernal beast went faster than ever and rushed heedlessly into the densest part of the wood. Soon a stout branch barred the milkmaid's path. While her mount ran beneath it, she was swept to the ground; and as she fell another branch caught her skirt; so that poor Denise fell to the ground, face downward, with her skirt over her head and consequently not where it usually was.

Auguste came up at that moment. You can imagine the sight that met his eyes; and what the skirt no longer covered was white and plump and fresh. But we must do the young man justice; instead of amusing himself by contemplating so many attractive things, he ran to Denise. She shrieked and wept and gnashed her teeth. He succeeded in rescuing her head from her petticoats, and quickly covered—what you know.

Denise rose; but she was covered with confusion, she dared not look up at the young man, who, far from taking advantage of her embarrassment, inquired solicitously whether she was hurt.

"Oh, no! it ain't anything," said Denise, still blushing. "I should have forgotten all about it before this if that cursed branch—Pardi! I must be mighty unlucky."

"Why so? because you fell? Why, my dear child, that might happen to anybody."

"Yes, but it's possible to fall without showing—without—Never mind, you're the first one that ever saw it, all the same."

"Ah! I would like to be the last one, too.—Come, why this offended expression? I promise you that I didn't see anything; I thought of nothing but helping you. I was so afraid that you had hurt yourself! It would have been my fault; for, if it hadn't been for my nonsense, you would have gone your way in peace, and this wouldn't have happened."

As Denise listened to Auguste, her anger passed away, and she even smiled as she said:

"I ain't cross with you any more. You're more decent than I thought; if I'd fallen like that before the village fellows, they'd have laughed to begin with, and then they'd have made a lot of silly talk, and there wouldn't have been any end to it. Instead of that, you picked me right up, and you looked so scared!—I'm sorry now that I scratched you. Come, kiss me, to prove that you forgive me."

Auguste made the most of this permission. Denise was so pretty when she smiled! and a woman who defends herself so sturdily makes the favors that she grants seem the more precious.

So peace was made between the milkmaid and the young man. But White Jean was no longer there; overjoyed to be rid of his burden, he had kept on through the woods.

"Oh! I ain't worried," said Denise; "I'm sure he's gone home. Let's take this path and we shall soon be in the village."

They walked on; the milkmaid beside Auguste, who once more considered her a charming creature, since she had smiled upon him and had allowed him to kiss her. In truth, Denise's face was no longer the same; an angry expression is not becoming to a pretty face, and features that are made to inspire love should never

express wrath. But they soon emerged from the woods and descended a hill, at the foot of which lay Montfermeil.

"There's my village," said Denise; "and look, do you see my ass trotting along down there? Oh! I knew he'd go right home.—Have you got business in the neighborhood?"

"No, not exactly. I am going to Monsieur Destival's country place. Do you know it?"

"To be sure; I carry milk to them, when Madame Destival stays there in summer. She always tells me to be careful about her little cheeses. You see, I make nice ones. I carried them a bigger one this morning, because Mamzelle Julie, madame's maid, told me they expected company from Paris."

"That being so, I probably shall have the pleasure of tasting your cheeses."

"But if you're going to Monsieur Destival's, you mustn't go to the village. I'll show you what road you must take."

"It will be much kinder of you to go with me and show me the way; as you are not anxious about your ass, there is nothing to hurry you."

"Oh, no! monsieur! I see that you're all right, but you're too fond of kissing the girls. Besides, my aunt is waiting for me. It's after noon, and our dinner-time.—Look, monsieur, take that road that goes up the hill yonder, then the first turn to the left, then the grass-grown road, and you'll find yourself at the place where you're going."

"I shall never remember all that. You will be responsible for my losing my way."

"You shouldn't have left your carriage."

"It was your lovely eyes that turned my head."

"Ah! you're going to begin again. Go along, quick, or they'll eat the cream cheese without you."

"I should be very sorry for that, as it was you who made it."

"The road up the hill—then turn to the left—then the grass-grown road. Adieu, monsieur."

"One more kiss, Denise."

"No, no; that sort of thing shouldn't be repeated too often; you'd soon get tired of it."

And Denise hurried down the hill toward the village. Auguste followed her with his eyes for a long while, saying to himself:

"She's very pretty, and she's bright too! What a pity that she doesn't live in Paris!—What am I saying? If she were in Paris, she'd look like all the rest; it's because she's a milkmaid that her face and her wit have impressed me.—Well, I will follow the directions she gave me, and arrive as soon as possible. I am sure that they are impatient for me to come; poor Bertrand won't know what to say, and Madame Destival will pout at me—how she will pout!—And great heaven! these scratches! how in the devil am I to explain them? Faith, I scratched myself picking nuts. It's a pity that nuts don't have thorns. But no matter, they may think what they choose."

So Auguste decided to resume his journey; but he cast another glance at Denise's village, and murmured as he walked away:

"I shall come again and make Montfermeil's acquaintance."

III

THE CHILD AND THE BOWL

Auguste followed the road that Denise had pointed out to him, his thoughts still fixed on the little milkmaid. The most fickle of men remembers the last woman who has succeeded in attracting him, until some new and pleasing object, causing him to feel other desires, effaces from his mind the charms of which he has lately dreamed.

Suddenly the sound of tears and lamentations roused the young man from his reverie. He looked about and spied, some ten yards away, by a large tree, a little boy of six years at most, dressed like a peasant's child, in a little jacket, trousers torn in several places, no stockings, and heavy wooden shoes; his head was bare, protected only by a forest of fair hair.

Auguste walked toward the little fellow, who wept lustily, and gazed with an air of stupefaction at the fragments of an earthen vessel at his feet, the former contents of which were spilled on the road. The child did not turn to look at the person who spoke to him, all his thoughts being concentrated on the broken vessel; he could do nothing but weep, raising to his head and eyes from time to time a pair of very grimy little hands, which, being wet by his tears, smeared his chubby face with mud.

"Why, what makes you cry so, my boy?" asked Auguste, stooping in order to be nearer the child.

The little fellow raised for an instant a pair of light-blue eyes, about which his little hands had drawn circles of black; then turned them again upon the pieces of broken crockery, muttering:

"I've broke the bowl—hi! hi! and papa's soup was in it—hi! hi! I'll get a licking, like I did before—hi! hi!"

"The deuce! that would be a misfortune, and no mistake! But stop crying, my boy, perhaps we can fix it all right. You say that you were carrying soup to your father?"

"Yes, and I broke the bowl."

"So I see. But why do they make you carry such a big bowl? You're too small as yet. How old are you, my boy?"

"Six and a half—and I broke the bowl, and papa's soup——"

"Yes, yes, it's on the ground; you mustn't think any more about it."

"It was cabbage soup—hi! hi!"

"Oh! I can smell it. But don't cry any more. I promise you that you shan't be whipped."

"Yes, I shall; I broke the bowl, and grandma told me to be very careful."

"Come, listen to me: what's your name?"

"Coco—and I've broke the bowl."

"Well, my little Coco, I'll give you money to buy another bowl, and to have three times as much cabbage soup made. I hope you won't cry any more now."

As he spoke, Auguste took a five-franc piece from his pocket and put it in the child's hand; but Coco stared at the coin with his big blue eyes open wider than ever, and continued none the less to sob bitterly, saying:

"Papa'll lick me, and so will grandma too."

"What! when you give them that money?"

"Papa's waiting for the soup for his dinner; and when he sees me without the bowl——"

"Well," thought Auguste, "I see that I must take it on myself to arrange this matter. It will make me still later; but this little fellow is so pretty! and they are quite capable of beating him, despite the five-franc piece. I wasted one hour making love to a milkmaid, I can afford to sacrifice a second to save this child a thrashing.—Come, Coco; off we go, my boy! Take me to your father; I'll tell him that it was I who knocked the bowl out of your hands as I passed, and I'll promise that you won't be beaten."

Coco looked at Auguste, then turned his eyes on the remains of the vessel, from which he was very reluctant to part. But Dalville took his hand, and the child concluded at last to start. On the way Auguste tried to make him talk, to divert him from his terror.

"What does your father do, my boy?"

"He works in the fields."

"And his name?"

"Papa Calieux."

"Papa Calieux evidently is not very pleasant, as you're so afraid of him. And your mother?"

"She's dead."

"Then it's your grandmother who makes the cabbage soup?"

"Yes, and she told me to be very careful and not break the bowl, like I did the other time."

"Aha! so you've broken one before, have you?"

"Yes, and there wasn't anything in it; but they licked me."

"You don't seem to be lucky with bowls. But the idea of whipping such a little fellow! These peasants must

be very hardhearted. Poor boy! he is still sobbing; and he isn't seven years old! So there's no age at which we haven't our troubles."

The boy led Auguste across several fields, through the middle of which ran narrow paths. It took Auguste still farther from Monsieur Destival's; but he did not choose to leave the child until he saw that he was happy. At last they reached a field of potatoes, and Coco stopped and grasped his companion's arm with a trembling hand.

"There's papa," he said.

Some forty yards away Auguste saw a peasant plying the spade. He dropped the child's hand and walked toward the peasant, who kept at his work, bent double over the ground.

"Père Calleux, I have come to make amends for a slight accident," said Auguste, raising his voice.

The peasant raised his head and displayed a face covered with blotches, a huge nose, great eyes level with the face, a half-open mouth, and teeth that recalled those of Little Red Riding Hood's enemy. That extraordinary countenance expressed profound amazement at hearing a fashionably-dressed gentleman call him by name.

"I imagine that Père Calleux is as fond of wine as of cabbage soup," said Auguste to himself as he scrutinized the peasant.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" asked the latter.

"I met your son Coco on the road——"

"Ah! where is he, I'd like to know? He was going to bring me my dinner.—Coco! what are you doing there?"

"Wait until I tell you the whole story; as I was looking at a fine view, I ran into the child, and I knocked the bowl he was carrying out of his hands; it broke, and——"

"You'll pay for it, that's all; for you're to blame for my having no dinner."

"Oh! that's but fair; that's why I came to speak to you. How much do I owe you? Name the price."

"Well, monsieur, it was a good soup-bowl; it was worth all of thirty sous; and there was twelve sous' worth of soup in it; for pork's dear round here——"

"See, here's five francs; are you satisfied?"

"Oh, yes! monsieur; that's fair enough; I haven't got anything to say."

"Then I hope that you won't scold your son; and, if you take my advice you won't make a child of that age carry such heavy loads any more."

"Oh! monsieur, it gets them used to being strong. We poor folks can't bring children up on lollipops.—Well, Coco, come here."

The child approached timidly, and, when he reached his father's side, began to whimper again, saying:

"I broke the bowl."

"Yes, yes, I know what happened; monsieur told me all about it. Go back to the house now, and tell Mère Madeleine to get me some dinner, and to be sure to have some wine. But no, I'd rather go to dinner at Claude's cabaret. Go home, Coco, and don't wait supper for me; I've got business in the town."

Auguste guessed that Père Calieux's business consisted in drinking up the five-franc piece to the last sou; but, satisfied to see that his young protégé was in high spirits, he bade the peasant adieu, and followed the child, who retraced the steps they had just taken; but this time he leaped and gambolled about his companion. His great grief was forgotten already! And they say that we are great children: it is true as concerns our foibles, but not as concerns happiness.

Auguste, happy in the little fellow's joy, took pleasure in watching him. Laughter sits so well upon a little face

of six years! A person who is fond of children cannot conceive how anyone can look with indifference on their tears. And yet there are people for whom a dog's yelping has more charm than the laughter of a child! It speaks well for their depth of feeling!

As they went along, Coco sang and ran and played about Auguste, playing little tricks on him, for they were great friends already; at six years and a half one gives one's friendship as quickly as at twenty one gives one's heart. Auguste ran and played with the child; he chased him, caught him, and rolled with him on the grass, heedless of the fact that it stained his clothes, because the boy's laughter was so frank and true that it was often shared by his elegant companion.

What! you will say, a dandy, a lady-killer, a butterfly of fashion, amuse himself playing in the fields with a little peasant boy? Why not, pray? Happy the man who, as he grows old, retains his taste for the simple pleasures of his youth! Henri IV walked about his room on all fours, carrying his children on his back. When surprised in that position by the ambassador of a foreign power, he asked him, without rising, if he were a father, and, upon his answer in the affirmative, rejoined: "In that case, I'll just trot round the room."

When they reached the place where he had first met the child, Auguste would have bade him adieu and have gone his way; but Coco held his hand and refused to release it.

"Come home with me," he said, "please come; Mamma Madeleine will give you some nice butter. Come and you can see Jacqueline; she's awful pretty, I tell you."

"Who is Jacqueline, my boy?"

"She's our goat; she sleeps by me."

"And is your home far away?"

"No, it's right over there."

Auguste submitted to be led away. Coco repeating: "It's right over there," gave his companion another half-hour's walk. At last they came in sight of a wretched hovel, the thatched roof of which had fallen in in several places, standing on a crossroad, and Coco shouted: "Here we are; do you see our house?" Then he pulled his companion's sleeve, to make him run with him.

An old woman sat in front of the hovel; she was thin and bent, and her complexion reminded one of an Egyptian mummy. But a strong, shrill voice emerged from her fragile body.

"So here you are at last, lazybones!" she said to the child; "what have you been doing so long? Where's the bowl?"

Coco looked at Auguste, whom he was already accustomed to look upon as his protector; Auguste told Mère Madeleine the same fable that he had told Père Callex, reinforced once more by the five-franc piece, which was the irresistible argument. At that the old woman tried to soften her voice, and urged Auguste to come in for a drink of goat's milk and some fresh butter, which were all that she could offer him. The young dandy entered the cabin. His heart sickened at the sight of that wretched habitation. The home of the Callex family consisted of a single room. It was a large room, but the daylight lighted only a small part of it. The bare earth formed the floor; the walls, half whitewashed, had nothing upon them to conceal their nakedness; the thatched roof threatened disaster. Two cot beds, in the darkest corner, had no curtains to shelter them from the wind which entered on all sides. An old buffet, a chest, a table and a few chairs were the only other furniture.

"Where on earth do you sleep?" Auguste asked the child. He led him to a corner of the room, where it was almost impossible to see anything, and pointed out a small straw bed on the floor, with a dilapidated woolen coverlet thrown over it. Close beside it was a goat, lying in some straw that was spread on the ground.

"There's my bed," said Coco. "Oh! I'm all right, you see; Jacqueline keeps me warm in winter. Jacqueline loves me, she does!"

And the child threw his arms round the goat's neck, and patted her, rolling over and over on the straw with her. But he was obliged to leave his faithful companion, for his grandmother called him.

"Come, come, good-for-nothing! You can play by-and-by. Come and put the bread on the table and give me a cup. The little scamp ain't good for nothing."

"You treat your grandson very harshly," said Auguste, taking his place at the table and tasting the rye bread and the milk.

"If I'd let him have his way, monsieur, he'd play all day long."

"But you must love the child dearly, as he's the only one your daughter left you."

"Oh! yes, I love him enough! But when a body's poor, it's just as well not to have none at all."

Auguste looked once more at the old peasant woman, and her extreme ugliness no longer surprised him so much. He took Coco on his knee, gave him milk to drink, and bread and butter to eat, and enjoyed looking at his pretty face and lovely fair hair. The old woman seemed astounded by the endearments which the fine gentleman lavished on the child, and muttered between her teeth:

"Oh! you'll spoil him! 'taint no use in doing that!"

"Is he learning to read and write?"

"Oh, of course! where's the money coming from, I'd like to know? Besides, we don't want to make a scholar of him. Is that wanted for driving the plough?"

"But you might at least give him a better place to sleep than he has."

"There ain't no sheets but for one bed, and it's no more'n fair for me to have 'em, old as I am. His father sleeps on a sack of straw same as he does. He don't sleep no worse for it either, I tell you."

"Here, Mère Madeleine, take this, and buy a bed for the child, and don't be so harsh with him."

As he spoke, Auguste rose, and put six more five-franc pieces in the old woman's hand. She, having never before seen so much money at one time, made curtsy after curtsy, overwhelming the stranger with thanks, and saying to the child:

"Come, Coco, thank monsieur for giving me all this money for you. Thank him, I say, quick!"

The child looked up at his grandmother in evident embarrassment.

"Let him alone," said Auguste, as he kissed him; "he doesn't know the value of money yet. The kiss he gives me is all the more sincere on that account. Adieu, my little Coco.—By the way, which is the road to Livry, please?"

"Follow this path, monsieur, and it'll take you to the main road. You'll be there in half an hour. Do you want Coco to show you the way?"

"It isn't necessary."

Auguste left the hovel; the child bade him good-bye and called after him:

"Come and play with me again, won't you?"

"Yes," said Auguste, "I promise."

IV

SOME PORTRAITS AFTER NATURE

Since eleven o'clock Dalville had been expected at Monsieur Destival's. Madame, a brunette of thirty, with a bright eye and a most expressive glance, who was an adept in the art of making the most of a shapely figure and seductive contours by an effective costume,—madame had finished her toilet. In the country it was, of course, very simple; but there are some *négligé* costumes which require much preparation. However, as madame was pretty and still young, she had spent only a half hour in donning a filmy white dress, confined at the waist by an orange sash; in arranging her curls becomingly and adorning them with a bow of the same color as her sash. Nor had she asked Julie more than six times if the yellow was becoming to her.

Julie replied that madame was fascinating, that yellow was always becoming to brunettes, and, in fact, that madame need not be afraid to wear any color. Madame smiled slightly at Julie, who was only twenty-four, but was extremely ugly, which is almost always considered a valuable quality in a lady's maid.

Monsieur Destival was ten years older than his wife; he was tall and thin; his face was not handsome, but it had character; unfortunately its expression was not of the sort that denotes an amiable person, whose wit causes one to forget his ugliness; it denoted self-sufficiency, conceit, and a constant tendency to be cunning.

His rustic cap, set well forward on his head, seemed to put a seal upon all the rest.

Monsieur Destival was formerly a government employé; with his wife's dowry he had bought the office of official auctioneer, which he had afterward sold at a profit. Although he never talked of politics for fear of compromising himself, and did not himself know to what party he belonged, he had had the shrewdness to set up an office as a business agent, had obtained a numerous clientage and had succeeded in tripling his capital. To be sure, he gave receptions, balls and small punches, and madame, whose eyes were full of fire and whose manners were charming, did the honors of her salon with infinite grace.

The country house, where they passed much of the time in summer, was large enough to enable them to entertain extensively, and to provide rooms for seven or eight friends. As monsieur never allowed more than one day to pass without going to Paris to look after his business, and as he sometimes passed the night there, madame—who was very timid, although she had the look of a strong-minded woman—liked to keep one of monsieur's male friends in the house.

A young man with twenty thousand francs a year could not fail to be hospitably received at Monsieur Destival's; and so, although it was only three months since Auguste had made his acquaintance, he was already on the footing of an intimate friend. Monsieur constantly urged him to call, whether at Paris or in the country, and madame was very fond of singing and playing with him.

But the clock struck twelve, and Monsieur Dalville did not appear. Madame was annoyed. Julie was posted on the lookout at a window on the second floor, and monsieur wandered from one room to another, exclaiming:

"The devil! my friend Dalville is very late, and he promised to come early, to be here for breakfast."

"Does Monsieur Auguste ever remember his promises?" asked madame snappishly.

"Oh! there you go again, always finding fault with him, attacking him, making fun of him."

"I, monsieur? What concern of mine are Monsieur Dalville's tastes or his failings? When did you ever see me attack him?"

"I know that it's all in joke; but you are a little bit caustic, my dear Emilie, you like to hurl epigrams. It is true, I admit, that I myself should be very biting, if I didn't hold myself back; in fact, I often am unconsciously. But after all, Dalville's a charming fellow—well-born—rich—talented."

"Talented? Oh! very slightly."

"I thought that he was strong on the violin?"

"No, monsieur, he often plays false—Well, Julie, do you see anyone coming?"

"Mon Dieu! no, madame, it's no use to look. And all those cheeses that I bought of Denise! How annoying!"

"For heaven's sake, mademoiselle, don't bother us with your cheeses. Go up to the cupola—you can see farther."

"Very well, madame."

Julie went upstairs and monsieur resumed the conversation.

"You won't deny, I trust, that Dalville has a pleasant voice."

"Pleasant! bah! a voice like everybody's else."

"Why, I should say that you and he sing duets together perfectly, especially the one from Feydeau's *Muletier*; you know, the one with 'What joy! what joy!' and that ends with 'coucou! coucou!'"

"Oh! you tire me, monsieur, with your 'coucous!'"

"He plays quadrilles on the piano."

"Who doesn't play now?"

"Faith, I don't; to be sure, I have always had so much business on hand that I have had to neglect my taste for music. At all events, Dalville is bright, pleasant, always in good spirits."

"There are days when he can't say three words in succession!"

"Let me tell you that I myself, when I'm very much occupied with some important matter, am not as agreeable as usual—that happens to everybody. To return to Dalville—he is rich—and young.—By George! I have an idea! such a delicious idea!"

"What is it then, monsieur?"

"I must find a wife for him."

"A wife for Monsieur Auguste? Why on earth should you interfere? Is it any of your business?"

"Isn't it my business to look after other people's business? This may turn out a profitable affair."

"Oh! don't go to making matches, monsieur, I beg! As if you knew anything about such things!"

"I flatter myself that I do, madame."

"A business agent make marriages—nonsense! that would be absurd!—Have you thought about your gun, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame, I told Baptiste to clean it; and Dalville promised to bring that old soldier of his, Bertrand; he will teach me how to use it; for a wolf has been seen in the neighborhood, you know, madame; and that is very unpleasant because it keeps one uneasy all the time."

"I don't suppose that that makes it impossible for you to beat up the wood?"

"Oh, no! on the contrary, madame, it was I who suggested that measure of safety. I propose to see the wolf, madame."

"You will do well, monsieur."

The conversation was interrupted by a noise in the next room.

"Ah! here's our dear Dalville at last, no doubt," said Monsieur Destival.

Madame said nothing, but she prepared a little pouting expression which would surely imply what she thought. Meanwhile the person whom they had heard did not enter the room, but continued to rub his feet on the doormat. Monsieur Destival threw the door of the salon open, and found, instead of Auguste, a little man of some fifty-five years, with a light wig, broad-brimmed straw hat, coat cut almost square, short breeches, and fancy stockings, who was rubbing and rerubbing his feet on the mat in the reception room.

"Ah! it's our neighbor, Monsieur Monin!" said Monsieur Destival, at sight of the little man.

At the name of Monin, Madame Destival made an impatient gesture, muttering:

"What a bore! why need he have come!"

"Hush! be still, madame! He still has a drug store to sell, and he wants to buy a house. I propose that he shall dine with us."

With that, Monsieur Destival turned back toward the door, where Monsieur Monin was still rubbing his feet on the mat.

"Well, aren't you coming in, my dear Monsieur Monin? What in the deuce are you doing there all this time? It's a fine day; you don't need to wipe your feet."

"Oh! but I'll tell you: as I came across the courtyard I looked up at the sky to see if we were going to

have a shower, and I stepped into a dung-heap that I didn't see."

"That's Baptiste's fault; it should have been taken away."

"There, that will do."

Monsieur Monin left the mat at last, and looking up at Monsieur Destival with a pair of big eyes level with his face, wherein one would have looked in vain for an idea, smiled a smile which cut his face in halves, although it was still dominated by a nose of enormous dimensions, always stuffed with snuff, like an unlighted pipe.

"How's your health, neighbor?"

"Very good, my dear sir. Pray come in; my wife is here and will be delighted to see you."

Monsieur Monin entered the salon and removed his hat, making a low bow to Madame Destival, who acknowledged the salute by a smile which might have passed for a grimace; but Monsieur Monin took it most favorably for himself, and began his inevitable question:

"How's your health, madame?"

"Passable, monsieur; not very good at this moment; my nerves are unstrung, I have palpitations."

"It's the weather, madame; the heat is intense to-day: twenty-six degrees and three-tenths."

"Twenty-seven, neighbor," said Monsieur Destival, glancing at his thermometer.

"That's surprising! it isn't so high at my house, and yet mine's in the same position. My wife says that I've made it too low lately."

"Why did not Madame Monin come with you, neighbor?"

"She's making pickles, and it will take her all day. My! but she takes a lot of pains with 'em! She won't go out to-day."

"I am deeply indebted to the pickles," whispered Madame Destival, while Monsieur Monin continued, doing his utmost to force another pinch into his nose:

"My wife said to me: 'I don't need you, Monin, take a walk.' So I came to see you."

"That was very agreeable of you, neighbor. Will you pass the whole day with us?"

"Why, yes, if it don't put you out, I should like to, because I'll tell you—when my wife's making pickles, she don't like to bother with cooking."

"Very good, then you will stay. You will meet Monsieur Dalville, a delightful young man, full of fun. His servant, who is an old soldier, is to give me a lesson in drilling, for I am appointed general——"

"What?"

"Why, yes, in the *battue* we're going to have."

"Oh, yes! I was saying——"

"Won't you take part in it, Monsieur Monin?"

"Why, I'll tell you: when I had my rifle, it was all right——"

"Madame, madame, a lovely calèche is just driving into the courtyard," said Julie, rushing into the salon.

"A calèche?"

"With Monsieur and Madame de la Thomassinière."

"What! have they come? How kind of them!" cried Monsieur Destival, running to the window. Madame Destival did not share her husband's delight; however, she rose to satisfy herself concerning the arrival of her new guests, and went out to receive them; for persons who have a calèche and a livery deserve the very greatest consideration. Thus, Monsieur Destival flew at his wife's heels, leaving Monsieur Monin, who was just about to tell him how many times he had hunted, and who, finding himself abandoned in the salon, turned to his ordinary

resource, and succeeded, by dint of perseverance, in forcing two dainty pinches of snuff into his nostrils.

Monsieur de la Thomassinière, for whom they ran downstairs so eagerly, was a man of about forty years of age. When he arrived in Paris, at eighteen, his name was Thomas simply, and he did not blush then for his mother, who kept a little wine-shop in her village. But residence in the capital had wrought an entire change in Monsieur Thomas. First a shop clerk, then a government clerk, then a money-lender, then a man of large affairs, Monsieur Thomas had seen Fortune smile constantly upon him. He speculated with his consols and was lucky; after that he forgot his village and adopted the tone and manners of a man in the first society. That a person should start from very low and rise very high—there is no objection to that; on the contrary, the man who wins success by his work, who makes his own fortune, leads us to believe that his merit is greater than his who attains the highest honor without exertion of his own. But the thing for which a parvenu is never forgiven is an affectation of pride and insolence, and the belief that by assuming the airs of a grand seigneur, he can lead people to forget the name and the clothes that he used to wear. Monsieur Thomas was such a one. He began by changing his too vulgar name for that of La Thomassinière. Then, instead of urging his mother to leave her village and enjoy his fortune, he contented himself with sending her a sum of money which would enable her to take down the sign of the *Learned Ass*, and to stop selling wine. But he forbade her to come to Paris, where, he said, the air was very unhealthy for elderly women. Then Monsieur de la Thomassinière set up an establishment,—carriage, servants, livery—bought a magnificent country estate and a very pretty

wife of eighteen, who was turned over to him with a dowry of one hundred thousand francs, and who did not so much as ask whether her husband was handsome or ugly, because, having been perfectly educated, she knew that a husband who owns a carriage is always comely enough, and, besides that, a woman is supposed to look at nobody but her husband.

Monsieur de la Thomassinière, dressed like a dandy and aping the manners of good society, but always affording a glimpse of the days of the *Learned Ass*, was forever talking about "my estate, my property, my servants, my horses." His wife was his only possession as to whom he did not use the possessive pronoun. As for madame, a lively, volatile, giddy creature, with no thought for anything save dress and amusements, she never spoke to monsieur except to ask him for money, or to talk about some festivity that she proposed to give.

"Ah! here are our dear friends!" said Monsieur Destival, hastening forward to offer his hand to Madame de la Thomassinière to help her alight, while monsieur gazed admiringly at his horses and gorgeous livery.

"Good-morning, Destival.—Lapierre, be careful of the horses.—Madame, allow me to offer my respects.—Cover my calèche, you fellows, it may rain in.—We have come without ceremony. It doesn't put you out to have me bring a few of my people, does it?"

"Of course not! I have enough to board and lodge them," replied Monsieur Destival, biting his lips, because his modest cabriolet was completely eclipsed by the superb calèche, and Baptiste and Julie, who composed his whole staff of domestics, would be hidden by a single one of the tall rascals whom Monsieur de la Thomassinière carried in his train. But these reflections did not prevent the exchange of the usual courtesies, they simply made him

ambitious to enlarge his household ; and so, as he led the young woman into the house, our business agent said to himself :

“ I must find a wife for Dalville, sell Monin’s drug shop, and buy a house for him ; then I will have a little groom—a negro—and dress him in red, so that he can be seen a long way off.”

The two ladies embraced.

“ Good-morning, my dear girl.”

“ Good-morning, dear.”

“ How sweet of you to come to see us ! ”

“ We are going to stay until to-morrow.”

“ How lovely your hats always are ! ”

“ Do you think so ? ”

“ Fascinating. I like that style of dress ever so much.”

“ It’s the latest—not quite low enough in the neck.”

“ Why, yes. I must have some of that material ; it’s very stylish.”

“ Oh ! it’s very simple ; the dress cost only two hundred francs. But for the country, and for calls on one’s friends—I’ll give you my dressmaker’s address.”

Madame Destival allowed Madame de la Thomasinière to go upstairs first, continuing to lavish compliments upon her, and counterfeiting the most extravagant delight in order to conceal her secret annoyance ; for the new arrival was genuinely pretty, her manners were charmingly vivacious, and Monsieur Dalville, whom Madame Destival was still expecting to see, had never met her. Monsieur Dalville, who was so quick to take fire, was very likely to make love to Madame de la Thomasinière, who was no less likely to listen to him. All this caused Madame Destival much secret anger ; but she affected the greater amiability on that account ; for in society one must know how to make believe, to speak

otherwise than one thinks; that is the great secret of social success.

Madame de la Thomassinière entered the salon, where Monsieur Monin had remained; he was on the point of attempting the introduction of another pinch of snuff, but checked himself at sight of the young woman, stepped back, removed his hat, and although he had never seen her before, began his inevitable question:

“How’s your health?”

But the petite-maitresse did not give the ex-druggist an opportunity to speak; she stifled with her handkerchief the outburst of laughter inspired by Monsieur Monin’s unique countenance, and turned to Madame Destival, saying:

“Who is this?”

“A neighbor of ours, very rich, but as stupid as he is ridiculous.”

“Ah! so much the better; we will have some sport with him. We may as well laugh a bit. Do you expect anybody else?”

“Why, yes, we expect a young man, a great friend of Monsieur Destival—Monsieur Auguste Dalville. Do you know him?”

“No, but I’ve heard a great deal about him; he is noted in society for his *bonnes fortunes* and his conquests. I shall be very glad to make his acquaintance. As a general rule, these naughty fellows are very agreeable—don’t you think so, my dear?”

“Why, sometimes—not always. However, you shall judge for yourself.”

“They say he’s very good-looking?”

“Oh! so-so; a passable face, that’s all; rather fine eyes, but his mouth is a little too large and his lips are very thick. I don’t like that type of face at all.”

"For my part, I don't like thin lips. Is he light or dark?"

"I can hardly remember; he is dark, I think."

"I had an idea that I had heard that Monsieur Dalville came to your house very often?"

"Oh, no! he goes to my husband's office, on business."

"Is he musical?"

"A little."

"I have brought a nocturne that I am crazy over; he must sing it with me."

"Monsieur Dalville will certainly be delighted to sing with you.—Excuse me, my dear, but I have some orders to give. In the country we don't stand on ceremony."

"I should hope not! I will go out and see your garden."

"Do; I am going to order luncheon, and I will come and call you."

The petite-maitresse tripped lightly down the stairs leading to the garden, and Madame Destival went to her bedroom, where she threw herself on a lounge, saying to Julie as she came in:

"Oh! Julie! I am so annoyed! I cannot stand any more, I am choking!"

"I should think as much, madame; I don't see how you can help it! To wait in vain for those whom you expect, and have to receive a lot of people that you don't expect!"

"Monsieur Destival is perfectly brutal, with his mania for inviting everybody he sees. If he had a château, he would not do any more!"

"That old Monin, who can't do anything but eat and drink!"

"And yet, if he were the only one, I shouldn't mind him, I promise you."

"Is his wife coming?"

"No, thank God! she is making pickles."

"That's very lucky! Madame Monin has a wicked tongue in her head; and inquisitive—why, she always comes into the kitchen to see what's going on."

"In spite of that, I should have preferred her to those Thomassinières, who put on so much style and assume the most unendurable airs and pretensions!"

"And then, who ever heard of bringing three servants to be fed! Those big rascals will eat everything in the house."

"What time is it, Julie?"

"After twelve, madame."

"He won't come. I am very glad of it now. Order luncheon. We will not dine until half past six."

"That's right; in that way they won't get any supper, at all events."

Julie went downstairs. Madame stood in front of her mirror, looked at herself a few moments, arranged a few locks of hair, then left the room, saying to herself:

"I look well enough for these people."

She went to the garden and joined Madame de la Thomassinière, whose husband, immediately on arriving, had asked Monsieur Destival for a pen and some ink, so that he might at once write an urgent letter on a matter of great importance. Monsieur Destival ensconced the speculator in his study.

"Make yourself perfectly at home," he said; "I will leave you."

And Monsieur de la Thomassinière, left to himself at the desk, scratched his head, looked at the pens, and wrote nothing at all, for the reason that he had nothing to write and no letter to send. But a man involved in great speculations should always seem preoccupied, and pretend

that he needs a writing desk; that impresses fools and credulous folk, and sometimes people of good sense even; the professional schemers are the only ones who do not allow themselves to be gulled by such petty wiles, because they often use them themselves.

On leaving La Thomassinière, Monsieur Destival returned to Monsieur Monin, who did not take offence because no attention was paid to him, his wife having accustomed him to that.

"Well, neighbor, have you sold that drug shop?" queried the business agent, slapping Monsieur Monin on the shoulder.

"Not yet, neighbor. It vexes me, because, I'll tell you, those who have taken my place temporarily aren't used to it as I am, and——"

"I'll sell it for you. I hope to see you in Paris next winter, Monsieur Monin, and to know you better."

"Certainly, monsieur."

"You must come to our house to play cards."

"Do you play loo?"

"No, but écarté, and boston. I have a very pretty house to sell you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, it's a great opportunity; the price is nothing at all."

"Is it insured?"

"I don't know; we will talk about all those things later; go out and take a turn in the garden. I am going to find out if they have any idea of giving us some luncheon."

Monin left the room; as Monsieur Destival turned to do likewise he confronted his wife, who exclaimed:

"What, monsieur! you have asked Monsieur Monin to call on us in Paris?"

"To be sure, madame."

"It's well enough in the country, because he's a neighbor. But in town! A man who can't say anything or do anything, and who knows no game but loo!"

"He is rich, madame."

"What if he is? that doesn't prevent his being as stupid as an owl."

"He won't be the first stupid person who has been to my house, madame. When one receives a great deal of company, it can't be otherwise. And besides, with your men of intellect, your authors and your poets, there's not a sou to be made."

"If you're so fond of money, monsieur, why do you invite so many people to your country house? It is ruinously extravagant, monsieur."

"Never fear, madame; I invite none but those who may be useful to me. Oh! I am very shrewd, I look a long way ahead. La Thomassinière is a valuable acquaintance, and I am very desirous to become intimate with him. I know that he often makes himself very ridiculous, that he tries to play the great man, and that the rôle isn't suited to him; that he occasionally makes blunders in speaking that smell horribly of his origin; that he is tiresome beyond words with his carriage, his estates, his property and his servants, whom he is forever throwing in one's face; but for all that, he's a man for whom I have a peculiar esteem and regard, because, as I told you just now, madame, I look a long way ahead.—But how about luncheon?"

"Speak to Baptiste, monsieur; I have given my orders to Julie."

Madame Destival went into the garden, where the petite-maitresse was strolling about, gathering a bouquet.

"I am picking your flowers, you see," she said.

"You are doing just right, my dear love; pray take all that you please."

"Your garden is lovely."

"Oh! it isn't very extensive; but there is plenty of shade, and that's what I like."

"So do I. I have had a forest planted on our estate at Fleury. It will be delicious, I assure you."

"But before it grows——"

"Oh! we have set out nothing but large trees. I will send you an invitation for next month. I am waiting for the painting and decorating I am having done to be finished, before going there for a month. But I shall take plenty of guests; for I don't like the country except with a lot of people about."

"For my part, I am rather fond of solitude."

"Mon Dieu! I should die if I were alone a single day!"

"So you don't like reading?"

"Yes, I do, for a moment or two, in bed; but not long at a time; it tires me."

"And music?"

"I play and sing only when someone is listening to me."

"Drawing?"

"Oh! that was all right at boarding-school! I mean to have a little theatre on my estate, and we will have theatricals there; that's great fun. I used to act often at boarding-school. I was particularly fond of the parts in which I changed dresses."

"What a child you are!"

"What would you have? one must pass the time somehow. If I had nothing but my husband to amuse me, great heaven! where should we be? A man who thinks of nothing but figures and exchange and heaven knows what. These business men are very disagreeable."

The ladies, having turned into another path, found themselves in the neighborhood of Monsieur Monin, who had stopped and seemed to be in a sort of trance before a plum tree laden with very large fruit. At sight of the ladies he took off his hat and muttered: "How's your—" But he did not finish the sentence, because he remembered that he had already paid his respects to them in the salon; so he turned and pointed to the tree, saying: "That tree bears very fine fruit."

"Why, my dear, you don't mean that you have fruit trees in your garden?" cried the *petite-maitresse*; "why, that's the worst possible form; you must take them all away and set out in their place ebony-trees, acacias, and sycamores."

"Oh! our garden makes no pretensions," rejoined Madame Destival, biting her lips with anger; "it isn't a park such as you have on your place, and Monsieur Destival is very fond of fruit."

"He is quite right," said Monin, who had walked nearer to the plum tree when Madame de la Thomassinière spoke of taking it up. "Fruit is the body's friend when it's good and ripe. But I was just going to say——"

"And monsieur's plums!" continued the younger woman. "Dear, dear! they are very vulgar; they should be left for the servants."

"Oh! when Monsieur Destival has made a fortune, then we will have a separate orchard; but meanwhile we are simple enough to be content with a small country place. What would you have? We were not born in a palace—in the lap of grandeur."

Madame Destival uttered these last words with malicious emphasis; but Madame de la Thomassinière seemed to pay no heed to them; as hare-brained as she

was inconsequent, she said offensive things unintentionally; and if she talked constantly of her dresses, her diamonds and her estate, it was less from vanity than as a matter of habit, whereas the wish to make a show of his wealth was the motive behind every act of her husband.

"Luncheon is waiting, mesdames," said Monsieur Destival, hastening forward gallantly to offer his arm to the petite-maitresse; "come; it is late, and you must be hungry. Faith, if Dalville comes, he will have to eat alone, that's all there is about it."

The master of the house walked away with the young woman. Monsieur Monin had taken off his hat and was about to offer Madame Destival his arm; but she, divining his purpose, vanished by another path, and the little man, having lost sight of her, decided to betake himself alone to the dining-room; but first he cast a last tender glance at the plum tree.

They were seated at the table, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière was still in the study.

"Tell him that we are going to have luncheon," said Monsieur Destival, "and that we're only waiting for him."

Baptiste went up to the study and called through the door:

"Luncheon is served, monsieur."

"Very well, very well, I will come down," replied La Thomassinière, continuing to roll little balls of paper; "I have only one more note to write."

The valet withdrew and reported the answer that was made to him.

"What a terrible man he is with his notes!" said Madame Destival; "doesn't he have a moment to himself, even in the country?"

"My husband?" replied the *petite-maitresse*; "why, my dear love, he's a most insufferable creature with his endless writing! He is never ready at meal-time; and even when we have twenty persons to dinner, which happens quite often, I have to send for him three or four times."

After making balls of paper for another five minutes, Monsieur de la Thomassinière concluded at last to go down to the dining-room.

"I beg pardon, here I am! It wasn't my fault," he said as he took his seat; "you shouldn't have waited for me. You see, I happened to think about a certain speculation I am interested in.—Give me the wing of a chicken and a glass of claret; that is all I take in the morning.—Well, Athalie, have you devastated madame's flower garden?"

Athalie, who ate quite heartily for a *petite-maitresse*, answered with a laugh:

"I have been doing what I chose, monsieur; you know perfectly well that it doesn't concern you."

"That is true, madame, that is perfectly true. I supply the money, I pay the bills. Twelve hundred francs to a milliner seems a trifle expensive. But madame must have the best there is."

"If you lose your temper, monsieur, the next bill will be twice as large."

"You know well enough, madame, that when it's a question of giving you money, I never have to be asked twice. When one is rich, that's perfectly natural; we must help the tradesmen to make money; isn't that so, Destival?"

"To be sure," replied his host, "I have the same feeling.—Well, what do you think of my claret? You don't say anything about it."

"It is very fair; but I have some better than this, oh! much better! I will give you some when you come to my house, and you'll see."

"And this cream—do you like it, madame?"

"Very much," replied the petite-maitresse. But Monsieur de la Thomassinière helped himself to three spoonfuls, saying:

"Let's taste the cream." Then he made a slight grimace and added: "Oh! my estate is the place for fine dairy products! This can't be compared with it; it's an entirely different thing! And our fowls! ah! they are delicious. To be sure, they are fed with such care! Now you people think that you are eating something good when you eat a chicken like this. Well, let me tell you that if you should see my poultry yard at Fleury, you would look on this as rubbish."

"It is very fortunate then that we know nothing about it," retorted Madame Destival, with a meaning glance at her husband. He, to change the subject of that pleasant conversation, turned to Monin, who had not said a word since he had been at the table, being engrossed by the second joint of a chicken, which he seasoned now and then with snuff, glancing occasionally with the eye of a connoisseur at a magnificent pie that stood in front of him, to which he seemed to be saying: "How's your health?"

"Your appetite seems to be in good condition, neighbor?" said Destival.

"Yes, yes, it's the weather that does it. Do you take snuff?"

And Monin offered his box to Destival, then to La Thomassinière, who, after taking a tiny pinch, took from his pocket a gold snuff-box at which he gazed for some time with a complacent expression.

"This is Virginia," he said, "the very best snuff there is; it's very expensive, but I don't care for any other kind. Try it, monsieur."

Monin, who never declined a pinch of snuff, was about to partake of the Virginia, when they heard the wheels of a carriage entering the courtyard, and Julie hurried into the dining-room, saying:

"Here's Monsieur Dalville; his cabriolet has just come in."

Madame Destival smiled with satisfaction, and the *petite-maitresse* hastily ordered her plate to be changed, so that the *débris* of her repast might not be seen in front of her. Monsieur Destival ran out to receive his dear friend, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière thought: "This Dalville must be a millionaire, to have his arrival make such a sensation."

As for Monin, with his pinch of Virginia in one hand and his fork in the other, confused by the bustle caused by Dalville's arrival, he put a dainty piece of ham to his nose and the superfine snuff in his mouth. He discovered his mistake, however, and put each article in its proper place.

V

THE DRILL, THE SWING, THE STORM, AND THE MUSIC

Destival, having gone out to greet Dalville, looked about for him in vain; he saw nobody near the cabriolet save little Tony and Bertrand, the latter of whom gave him a military salute.

"Well! where is he? which way did he go in?" inquired Destival. Bertrand passed his tongue over his lips and scratched his ear, seeking a suitable reply; at last he said in a firm voice:

"Monsieur Dalville will be here as soon as I am."

"But you seem to have got here before him; did he leave you on the way?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Does he know anyone in the neighborhood?"

"It would seem so, monsieur."

"At all events, he is really coming; that's the main point."

Destival ran back to inform the ladies that his friend Dalville would soon be there; that he had stopped to see a friend, but that he could not be long.

"Why, I didn't know that he knew anyone in this vicinity," said Madame Destival in surprise.

"Mon Dieu! this gentleman keeps us on the anxious seat a long while," said the vivacious Athalie, leaving the table; while La Thomassinière, annoyed that a thought should be given to anybody but himself, paced the floor a few moments, then stamped violently, and put his hand to his forehead.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, "I had almost forgotten. What time is it? Not one yet? Is there a post office* anywhere near?"

"Do you mean a donkey post?" asked Monin.

"No, for letters, of course!"

"Oh, yes! on the second street. By the way, I believe—I won't say for sure, but I'll tell you——"

"I'll go there at once; I shall be in time."

And Monsieur de la Thomassinière rushed from the

*French *poste*; when used alone the meaning is ambiguous and depends on the context. Hence the misunderstanding.

room as if he would overturn everybody, paying no heed to Destival, who shouted after him:

"Stay here; I'll send it for you. Besides, your own servants are here."

The speculator darted out across the fields, and having reached a dense thicket, lay down on the grass and went to sleep, saying to himself:

"A man like me must never have a moment to himself."

The ladies returned to the salon. Monsieur Destival went down to Bertrand, and Monin, seeing that everybody had left the table, concluded to do likewise and followed his host.

As soon as Bertrand had taken some refreshment, Monsieur Destival went to him and begged him to give him a lesson in drilling and giving orders. The ex-corporal was very willing to do anything that recalled glorious memories. He repaired with Monsieur Destival to the terrace in the garden, where the latter had his rifle brought to him, and a foil which he used as a sword, and stood as straight as a ramrod as he carried out Bertrand's orders. Monin, who had followed them, thought that it was courteous to do as his host did; he took a spade in lieu of a musket, and, standing behind his neighbor, followed him through "right shoulder," "left shoulder," "present arms," etc., pausing only to use his snuff-box.

For more than an hour the gentlemen had been on the terrace with Bertrand, who would gladly have passed the day in such a pleasant occupation. Monsieur Destival, ambitious to outshine the rural constables, began to carry himself like a Prussian grenadier; and Monin, perspiring profusely in his efforts to do as well as his host, did not notice that, while taking aim, presenting arms and grounding arms with his sword, he had pushed back

his cap and wig, thereby giving himself a most swaggering appearance.

The drill was interrupted by roars of laughter from the effervescent Athalie, who appeared on the scene with Madame Destival.

Monsieur Monin paused in the act of presenting arms. It was high time; a moment more and the wig would have fallen back and have exhibited the ex-druggist as the Child-Jesus. As for Monsieur Destival, he turned toward the ladies, with a martial air, weapon in hand, and said:

"Well, what do you think of my set-up?"

"Superb! But I prefer monsieur here with his spade; he is more amusing."

"What, neighbor, are you taking a lesson in the manual?"

"Yes," replied Monin, wiping his brow and pulling his wig forward; "I followed you at a distance, and I'll tell you——"

"But what can have become of Monsieur Dalville?" said Madame Destival, paying no attention to Monin; "he left you on the road, he said that he would be here as soon as you, and you have been here two hours. At whose house did you leave him, Bertrand?"

"At whose house, madame? I didn't say that I left him at anyone's house."

"But you must have seen him go into a house, didn't you? Of course you didn't leave him on the highroad?"

"Excuse me, madame, but that's just what I did: I left my lieutenant in the middle of the road, about half a league from here."

"You do not tell the whole story, Bertrand: Monsieur Auguste wasn't alone on the road, I fancy."

"I didn't see whether anybody was coming, madame."

"Oh! there must have been some peasant girl there, some rustic beauty, who captivated Monsieur Dalville!"

"What do you mean, my dear? Does he consort with that kind?" inquired the *petite-maitresse* disdainfully.

"He consorts with all kinds, my dear. Bless my soul, a scullery maid, if she has a little turned-up nose, a——"

"Oh dear! oh dear! this goes far to destroy the good opinion I had formed of this gentleman."

"I tell you," said Madame Destival in a lower tone, drawing nearer to her friend, "he's a perfect libertine! If it weren't for my husband, I should never receive him. He's a man whose acquaintance is likely to endanger a woman's reputation. But Monsieur Destival is daft over him. He absolutely insists on entertaining him, and is forever inviting him here. I don't like quarrels, and I let my husband do what he chooses."

"Well, I am not so obliging; I do only what I like, and I receive only those people who suit me. Ah! if Monsieur de la Thomassinière should try to thwart me, I should instantly become subject to hysterics."

The ladies were about to return to the garden and Bertrand to continue his lesson in drilling, when they heard loud laughter in the courtyard, and in a moment Dalville made his appearance.

"Ah! good-day, my dear friend," said Monsieur Destival, going to meet Auguste, rifle in hand; "we had about given you up. Shoulder arms, eh? Isn't this about right?"

"I see that Bertrand will make something of you."

"Here is my wife, who has been in a temper because you didn't come."

"Mon Dieu! how my husband does irritate me!" said Madame Destival to her neighbor, assuming a frigid air to welcome Auguste, who said to her:

"What, madame! have you been so kind as to be uneasy because of my non-appearance?"

"I have not said a word of that sort, monsieur. I cannot conceive why Monsieur Destival delights in crediting me with statements the thought of which I do not even entertain. I simply considered that when a person promised to arrive in time for luncheon, it was ridiculous to put in an appearance at the end of the day. However, I am not at all surprised, and—But, bless my soul! what on earth has happened to you, monsieur? What a plight you are in! A wound in the face—clothes all disarranged—It would seem that you have had some thrilling adventure."

"In truth, madame," said Auguste, bowing to Athalie, who returned his salutation with a simpering air, "I did have an encounter——"

"Perhaps he met the wolf," suggested Monin, walking up to Destival; "it seems that there is one in the woods. The peasant woman who sold my wife her cucumbers told her that the other day——"

"Can it be that you have been fighting with a wolf, my gallant Dalville?" cried Destival, presenting his bayonet to the company as if he proposed to charge a hollow square.

"Oh, no!" said madame, with a sly smile, "it was no wolf that made that mark on monsieur's face; it looks like something entirely different; don't you think so, my dear love?"

"That looks to me exactly like the scratch of a fingernail," said Athalie the vivacious, looking very closely at Auguste; "isn't it that, monsieur?"

"You are not mistaken, madame."

"So you have been fighting, have you, monsieur?" said Madame Destival.

"No, madame, I simply met a very pretty little boy, who had broken the bowl in which he was carrying soup to his father. I gave him a piece of money to console him; at that, in his joy he embraced me; he patted my cheeks with his little hands, and he—he accidentally scratched me a little. That is a faithful account of my adventure, mesdames."

Madame Destival bit her lip and glanced at her companion, who smiled. It was evident that they both doubted the truth of Dalville's story; but he cared very little what they might think. Taking advantage of this brief pause in the conversation, Monin went to Auguste, whom he had met twice at his neighbor's and said to him in the most amiable manner:

"How's your health?"

"Very good, Monsieur Monin, except for this scratch, which is not dangerous."

"You are joking, monsieur! I tell you finger-nail scratches are not to be trifled with.—Do you use snuff?"

"Thanks."

"I know all about it, and I'll tell you why: my wife has a——"

Having no curiosity to hear Monin's story, Dalville followed the ladies, who had returned to the garden. Athalie's presence aroused in the young man a desire to be agreeable. He had not expected to find any other lady than the mistress of the house, who was well enough, but with whom he no longer took pains to be agreeable. Why? Was it because he was no longer in love with her, or because he was sure of pleasing her, or—On my word, you ask me too much.

Madame de la Thomassinière's vivacity and unconventionality harmonized perfectly with Auguste's lively humor and free-and-easy manners; and as greater liberty

is authorized in the country, after a very short time he and the petite-maitresse were laughing and joking together as if they had known each other for years.

Madame Destival did not share their gayety; she was sulky, said little, and contented herself with darting eloquent glances at the young man from time to time; the more intimate her two companions became, the more her ill-humor seemed to increase. Meanwhile they were strolling about the garden; they sat down; then Madame de la Thomassinière went to look at a pretty view, or pluck a flower, or chase a butterfly, and as she sauntered back showed Auguste a double row of lovely teeth, and seemed to say:

"Why don't you come with me?"

But Madame Destival did not leave her, and although visibly annoyed, she too ran after the butterflies.

"What on earth is the matter with you, my dear love?" said Athalie, good-humoredly; "you don't seem very hilarious."

"I beg pardon, I am satisfied; but a severe headache has just come on."

"Go in the house and lie down for a moment."

"No, my child, oh, no! I prefer to stay with you."

"You shouldn't stand on ceremony in the country. Besides, monsieur will bear me company. We will catch butterflies together."

"I will catch whatever you please, madame," said Auguste, with a smile which was instantly succeeded by a wry face, because Madame Destival pinched his arm as she replied:

"No, the air will do me good. But I thought that you intended to have some music?"

"Oh! we shall have time enough this evening, as I am to pass the night here. Is monsieur to remain?"

"If madame will kindly allow me to do so?" said Auguste, glancing at his hostess, who replied angrily:

"As you please, monsieur."

After walking for some time longer, they stopped beside a swing, and the sprightly Athalie sprang to a seat on the narrow plank, held in place by two cords only, saying to Auguste:

"Oh! do give me a push, please. I am wild over swinging; I have nearly killed myself a dozen times, but it makes no difference, I always come back to it. Not too high, monsieur, do you understand?"

"As high or as low as you choose, madame."

Auguste stood near the swing and pushed gently, while Madame Destival seated herself at a little distance, with her handkerchief at her eyes. The young man was distraught; he looked at Athalie and Madame Destival in turn; the former's petulant ways attracted him, the other's grief seemed to cause him pain.

"Oh! what fun! how lovely it is!" cried the petite-maitresse. "Keep on, monsieur, harder! Look out, you are jerking me.—Ah! my dear, you can't imagine how I like this!"

Madame de la Thomassinière gave no sign of being tired of swinging; but Madame Destival, who was not at all amused, resorted to the device of fainting, and fell back in her chair with a hollow groan. Thereupon Auguste left the swing and ran to Emilie, exclaiming:

"What is the matter, madame?"

"Leave me; you are a monster!" replied Madame Destival, her eyes still closed.

"What have I done, pray?"

"Do you think that I have not noticed your conduct?"

"My conduct has been perfectly natural, I should say——"

"Not content with coming here from—from I don't know where, monsieur presumes, in my presence, to make love to that flirt, who behaves in the most indecent way! I should have hoped that you would at least respect my house, monsieur!"

"Really, madame, I cannot in the least understand your anger. I am courteous, polite—nothing more."

"Do you think that I have no eyes? It is far too evident. The least that you can do is to show some little self-restraint!"

"But——"

"Hush!"

"Well!" said Athalie, noticing that the swing moved more slowly, "what are you doing, monsieur? You are not pushing, you are letting me stop; and I don't want that. Are you tired already? Fie! a young man too!"

At that moment appeared Monsieur Monin, who, seeing that his host was determined to practise the manual until dinner, and feeling that he had not the strength to continue, had dropped his spade and bent his steps toward the garden, where, as he wiped his forehead, he sought to freshen up his ideas by resorting to his snuff-box.

"You have come in the nick of time, Monsieur Monin," said Madame Destival; "madame is sorely in need of somebody to swing her. Do her that service, she will be overjoyed."

As she said this, Emilie rose, took Auguste's arm and led him to another part of the garden, leaving Monin agape with amazement at the task assigned him, and Athalie still in the swing. Having her back to the others, she had not noticed their departure and was still ignorant of the fact that she had changed swingers.

"Well! push me, monsieur!" she said, wriggling about in the swing to make herself go.

Monin fortified himself with a pinch of snuff and walked toward the swing; but, having miscalculated the space that it covered in swinging back, the seat came down upon him as he was turning up his sleeves in order to push harder, and the young woman's plump figure struck him in the face.

Dazed by the blow, Monin fell on the turf a step or two away; while Madame de la Thomassinière gave a little shriek because his nose had almost unseated her.

"How awkward you are!" she cried; "if I hadn't held on tight, I should have fallen. Come and stop me, and help me to get down.—Well, monsieur, do you propose to leave me here?"

Monin was not quick to rise, and he was looking for his cap, which the swing had knocked off, muttering:

"I am at your service in a minute, madame. You see, if I should go home without my cap, my wife would make a row."

Really vexed, Athalie turned her head and saw Monin trying to climb a tree to reach his cap, which the swing had sent flying to a high branch. The young woman laughed heartily, then jumped down from the swing and walked away, seeking Auguste and Madame Destival in every thicket.

After scouring the garden to no purpose, she returned to the place where she had left Monin; he was still at the foot of the tree, which he had tried vainly to climb, gazing despairingly at his cap, lodged on a branch, which he could not reach, and seeking in his snuff-box some inspiration as to the means of recovering it.

"Which way did they go, monsieur?" asked Athalie, stopping beside him. He looked stupidly about and said:

"Who, madame?"

"Monsieur Dalville and Madame Destival."

"I can't tell you—unless they've gone to drill too."

Athalie went toward the house. Destival was still with Bertrand on the terrace. The young woman entered the salon; it was empty.

"This is very polite," said Athalie; "a perfect gentleman that! It seems that there is no standing on ceremony here. I would like right well to know if Monsieur Dalville is with Madame Destival. She had a sick-headache; I am curious to know how she gets rid of it."

The young woman left the salon and passed through several rooms without meeting anybody, for Julie and Baptiste were busy in the kitchen, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière's three servants had gone to the village to play *goose*. She went up to the first floor, where Madame Destival's bedroom was; but the door was closed and locked.

"She is in her room," thought the *petite-maitresse*; and she knocked gently. There was no reply; she knocked louder. At last Madame Destival asked who was there.

"I, my dear," Athalie replied. "I came up to have a chat with you."

"Excuse me, I had dropped asleep; my headache is so much worse——"

"I have one too, and I will lie down in your room a moment; it will do me good."

"Hasn't Julie shown you your room?"

"No, my love; let me in, pray."

Madame de la Thomassinière was determined not to go away, and after some little time she was admitted. Madame Destival appeared with her clothes no more disarranged than was natural in a person who had been lying down. As she went in, Athalie glanced about the room, and her eyes longed to pierce the walls of a small closet

at the foot of the bed, the mirrored door of which was tightly closed.

"Oh dear! how my head jumps!" said Madame Destival, putting her hand to her forehead.

"Isn't it any better?" asked Athalie, seating herself on a couch.

"No; quite the contrary."

"Lie down again, my dear; I will stretch myself out on this couch; I shall not be sorry for a little rest myself. This hot sun affects my nerves."

Madame Destival seemed disinclined to return to her bed; she walked about the room impatiently, and said:

"Oh, no! I don't want to go to sleep again, it's almost dinner-time."

"How on earth did you ever succeed in sleeping here? Your husband makes such a noise with his 'present arms,' and his 'ready, aim!'"

"It didn't disturb me at all."

"What did you do with Monsieur Dalville?"

"What did I do with him? Why, nothing."

"I thought he was with you."

"With me?"

"When you left me in the swing, didn't you take him away with you, and leave in his place the charming Monsieur Monin, whose society is so entertaining?"

"Monsieur Auguste left me immediately; he must have gone for a walk to the village."

"Do you know, my dear, that I should not have recognized Monsieur Dalville from the picture that you drew of him. In the first place, you said that he wasn't good-looking, that he had a common look."

"I did not say common, I swear."

"That he hadn't good style, that he was a rake, a ne'er-do-well, a man whose visits might compromise a woman."

"Oh! you exaggerate, my dear!"

"I beg your pardon, but you said all that, you drew a shocking portrait of him! For my part, I think him very good-looking, and I like his manners very much."

"That is very fortunate for him, madame."

"Well! what on earth are you doing? You are putting on your belt inside out."

"Why, so I am! I have fits of absent-mindedness."

"Shall I fasten your dress for you, my dear?"

"Thanks; I can dress myself."

At that moment the sound of something being placed against the window made Emilie jump.

"What is that?" she said.

"It was in that closet, I think; something fell."

"No, madame, the noise didn't come from the closet; it was at the window."

The ladies went to the window and saw Monsieur Destival, who had just placed a ladder against the outer sill.

"What in the world are you doing, monsieur?" exclaimed Madame Destival in alarm; "what is the meaning of this ladder and all this confusion?"

"My dear love, I know now all the evolutions there are; the only thing left for me to learn is to storm a fort; that's the bouquet, so Bertrand says, and he's going to show me how. You, mesdames, are inside the fortress, you represent the enemy; you must try to keep us out, but we will enter the citadel in spite of you."

"What is the meaning of this absurd nonsense, monsieur?"

"It's the bouquet, madame, I tell you.—Come, Bertrand; one! two! At the double-quick, isn't it?"

"I am not willing that you should storm my room, monsieur.—Take away that ladder, Bertrand, I beg you.

—You are mad, monsieur! Do you have to storm a fort to catch a wolf?"

"Nobody knows what may happen, madame."

"I know that you won't happen to reach my room, monsieur."

As she said this, Madame Destival closed her window with a bang, and led Madame de la Thomassinière from her room, saying:

"Let's go down, my dear, let's go down, I beg you, for they'll turn everything topsy-turvy with their drilling."

They went out on the terrace, where Monsieur Destival still held his ladder, which Bertrand tried in vain to take away from him. The business agent was determined to raise it somewhere.

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, if you absolutely must lay siege to something," said Madame Destival, "let it be a tree in the garden, and not my bedroom."

Bertrand grasped at this idea, and Athalie suggested to them that they should attack the tree in which Monsieur Monin's cap had lodged. They went toward the swing and found the ex-druggist there, with his short, fat arms around the tree, trying to climb it, but unable to raise himself more than three inches from the ground.

At sight of the ladder, Monin uttered a cry of delight, and outdid himself in thanks when Monsieur Destival ascended it at the double-quick, having no suspicion that the manœuvre had any other purpose than the recovery of his cap. But alas! Monsieur Destival thought it best to capture the trophy with his bayonet, and the point of his weapon pierced the top, which was of thin straw. Bertrand shouted "Bravo!" Monin made a wry face, the ladies laughed, and Auguste arrived in time to witness the tableau.

Auguste bestowed a sweet smile on Madame de la Thomassinière and a rather cold bow on Madame Destival. I do not know whether you can guess the cause, but the ladies had no difficulty.

"Are you just from the village, monsieur?" said the petite-maitresse, showing her pretty teeth.

"Yes, madame, I have had a most instructive walk; I have acquired some new knowledge, and I hope to make good use of it."

"Dinner is on the table," said a thin, yellow little man, with a napkin on his arm. It was Baptiste, the one male servant, who acted as scrubber, cook, footman, errand-boy and butler all at once, pending the time when Monsieur Destival should establish his household on a more extensive scale. So that poor Baptiste was worked to death, and told Julie every day that he did not propose to remain in a place where they made him do the work of a horse.

"Say that dinner is served, Baptiste. That fellow will never be trained!—Come, mesdames, to the table! Ouf! I have well earned it. I have drilled terribly hard to-day.—Here, Monin, here's your cap. Did you see how I picked it up?"

"You made a hole in it," said Monin, gazing at the crown with a piteous expression.

"Bah! in the heat of the action; charge, bayonets! one, two! eh, Bertrand?—But the ladies have gone already. Let's go now and attack the dinner; I expect to make a tremendous breach in it. Go to Julie, Bertrand; she'll look after you."

Bertrand betook himself to the servants' quarters, and Monin, after trying to bring the straws nearer together and conceal the hole in his cap, followed his host to the dining-room.

They were all seated at the table, when Monsieur Destival cried:

"Well! how about Monsieur de la Thomassinière? He's missing again."

"That's so, I had forgotten all about my husband," said Athalie, smiling at her right-hand neighbor; and that neighbor was Auguste, who was seated between the two ladies. "Oh! you mustn't wait for him."

"It's very annoying! Where can he have gone? Do you suppose he has lost his way in the Forest of Bondy?"

"It's a very dangerous place," said Monin, fastening his napkin to his buttonhole; "they say there's a band of robbers there just now, who——"

"Suppose I tell your three servants to beat up the neighborhood? What do you think, madame?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; don't worry about my husband, I beg. I assure you that he will turn up. I am not in the least anxious."

"So long as madame is not disturbed," said Madame Destival, pursing her lips, "it seems to me that we should do wrong to be. After what she says, we may venture to dine."

"Very good, let us dine. One, two, at the soup, and by the left flank at the beef."

"For heaven's sake, monsieur, are we going to hear nothing now but 'one, two'?"

"Faith, madame, this day has given me a great liking for the military profession. What a fine thing is a man who holds himself perfectly straight, with his body thrown back!—Pass me the beans.—Your man Bertrand is a terrible fellow; he knows his business root and branch. Deuce take it! what a fellow he is! How he handles a musket! He told me that he was satisfied with me. Three or four lessons more, and I hope——"

"I hoped that you knew quite enough, monsieur."

"Madame, a man cannot know too much about manag-
ing weapons. I wish now that we might be attacked by
robbers!"

"Would you set them to drilling, monsieur?"

"No, madame, but I would make the most of my ad-
vantages; I can fire four shots in five minutes now."

"I didn't know that, monsieur."

"Oh! there are still more surprising things. Just
look at Monin; he did nothing but listen to us a mo-
ment, but see how much better he carries himself than
he did this morning."

"It is certain," said Monin, raising a turnip on his
fork and putting it in his mouth as if the latter were a
gun barrel, "it is certain that drilling is good for a man;
and I'll tell you what——"

Monin was interrupted by the arrival of La Thomas-
sinière, quite out of breath, for he had taken a long nap
under his tree, and, on waking, had reflected that they
might dine without him.

"Ah! here you are at last, you terrible man!" said
Destival.

"I beg pardon; I am late, I know, but I have written
at least ten letters since I left you."

"Why didn't you write them here?"

"Faith, I was in such a hurry that I went into the first
place I saw."

"Well, sit down beside Madame Destival."

"I'll soon overtake you, for, you see, I don't eat beef;
it's poor stuff, is beef! it isn't worth eating."

Monsieur de la Thomassinière took his seat, gazing at
Auguste with some surprise, because he had given him
only a slight nod, and continued to eat without appar-
ently paying any attention to the parvenu, which was a

sore trial to that gentleman, who always wanted to make a sensation.

But Dalville had seen on the instant what manner of man Monsieur de la Thomassinière was. Fools enjoy the advantage of being accurately judged in a very short time, whereas it often requires a long time to form a just appreciation of men of sense.

The dinner was lively enough, thanks to Auguste and his neighbor on his left, who talked all manner of nonsense and seemed very much inclined to suit their actions to their words. The mistress of the house ate little, and Monin ate a great deal. Monsieur Destival attacked each dish in measured time, and stuck his fork into a radish as if it were a bayonet. As for Monsieur de la Thomassinière, when he found that Dalville was determined not to take any notice of him, he decided to make himself prominent by holding forth concerning the various dishes. He declared the chicken cooked too much, the peas too large, the salad too sour, and the beaune too new. An exceedingly agreeable guest was Monsieur de la Thomassinière; but a very rich man must never seem content with what is put before him. The idea! that would make people think that he had never eaten anything good.

It was dark when they reached the dessert, because it was late when they sat down. The sky was heavily overcast; the heat became more intense, and the flashes that rent the clouds from time to time indicated an impending storm.

Monsieur Monin made haste to eat his cheese, because his wife was afraid of the thunder, and his orders were to go home to her whenever a storm was brewing. La Thomassinière asked if the house was provided with lightning rods. Monsieur Destival ordered all the windows

closed at the first clap of thunder, and the sight of the lightning made him forget to present arms with his glass. As for the *petite-maitresse*, she declared that she was terribly afraid of a thunder storm, and she hid her face upon Auguste's shoulder at every flash.

"The deuce! the deuce! the weather is very threatening!" said Monsieur Destival. "Come, messieurs, a glass of champagne; that will scatter the clouds and make us forget.—Baptiste, have you shut everything tight?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Be very careful that there's no draught."

"But you are stifling us, monsieur."

"Windows must be closed when it thunders, madame; that is only prudent."

"Then why don't you have a lightning-rod?" said La Thomassinière; "I have three on my country-house, two on the house I live in in Paris, and one on my other fine house on Rue de Buffaut."

"Yes, I shall have one put on at once.—Come, messieurs, your glasses, there goes the cork."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried Athalie, pressing against her neighbor; "how you frightened me with your cork!"

"The storm seems to frighten you terribly, my dear love," said Madame Destival, with a sneer.

"Oh, yes! terribly!"

"My wife's nerves are extremely sensitive."

"Look out, you're not pouring into the glass, Destival."

"That confounded flash dazzled me. Will your charming wife have some?"

"Yes, I'm very fond of champagne. Please make it foam a lot, monsieur."

"Here you are, belle dame.—Come, Dalville, drink with madame."

"That is just what monsieur is doing," said Madame Destival spitefully.

"And you, Monin, pass your glass."

"Oh! I was just going to say that I must go; my wife's afraid of thunder."

"Why, your wife's making pickles, you know; she's busy."

"But when it thunders she drops everything and crawls under a woollen quilt, and if I shouldn't go to see how she is—Oh! what a crash! it came very soon after the lightning, so the storm can't be far away."

"Suppose we have a little music?" said Monsieur Destival, helping himself to a third glass of champagne, in order to recover his courage; "it seems to me that that wouldn't be a bad idea. What do you say, Dalville?"

Auguste had stooped to pick up his knife, which he had dropped under the table for the second time.

"Monsieur is awkward to-day," said Madame Destival, rising from the table with a gesture of impatience; "I believe that we shall do well to go up to the salon."

At that moment the clouds broke, the rain fell in torrents, and the fields assumed a novel aspect. Everybody rose; the petite-maitresse leaned heavily on Auguste's arm, because the storm had taken away all her strength. Monsieur de la Thomassinière, desirous to play the scholar, because he thought that his companions were no more learned than he, went to one of the windows and declared that the storm would not be *consequential* because the atmosphere was very beautiful at sunset.

Auguste could not restrain a slight laugh, which caused the trembling Athalie to press his arm all the harder. Monsieur Destival, who had recovered his spirits in some measure since the rain began, which made the storm much

less dangerous, executed a half wheel to the left of the company, and charged up the stairs at the double-quick. Monin was left alone in the dining-room, folding his napkin as a matter of habit, and muttering as he listened to the rain:

"It's coming down hard, and I haven't any umbrella, and they've made a hole in the top of my cap! so what am I going to do?"

Having taken snuff two or three times, our friend decided to address Julie, who had just passed through the room. He followed her, calling after her:

"I beg pardon, mademoiselle, but couldn't you——"

As Julie did not reply, Monin followed her to the kitchen, where Bertrand was drinking with Baptiste and Monsieur de la Thomassinière's three tall footmen, who did not agree with their master that the beaune was too new.

"Could you lend me an umbrella?" asked Monin.

"We haven't any here," Julie replied curtly.

"Nonsense! an umbrella!" said Bertrand, in whom the beaune had already aroused a tendency to talk. "As if a man should use such a thing! Is that what I taught you this morning—to handle an umbrella?"

The guests began to laugh, and Julie elbowed Monin gradually toward the door, saying:

"I don't like to have so many people in my kitchen, monsieur; they get in my way. Besides, you don't belong here."

Julie closed the door; and Monin, finding himself expelled from the kitchen, decided to go up to the salon and wait until the storm should have subsided. Dalville and Athalie were at the piano, singing a nocturne. Monsieur Destival was playing écarté with Monsieur de la Thomassinière; and Madame Destival, while pretending

to watch the game, lost nothing of what took place at the piano.

"I have the honor to wish you good-evening," said Monin, noiselessly entering the salon.

"Why, haven't you gone, neighbor? I supposed that you were at home before this."

"No, I'll tell you—the rain——"

"In that case, you must take a hand. Come, bet on me and you will win."

"Can I bet now?"

"Yes, it isn't too late."

"All right; then I'll bet two sous."

"What sort of bet is that—two sous!" exclaimed La Thomassinière contemptuously; "do you suppose that I play for copper? It's vulgar enough to play for a crown. Take that away, monsieur, it's covered with verdigris."

"It's my two sous, monsieur; I bet them."

"No one wants them, monsieur."

"What! have I won already?"

"Here, I'll fix that," said Destival, taking a ten-sou piece from his pocket; "I'll add eight sous to make up Monin's bet. So I stake three francs forty, and you, my dear fellow, three francs ten. My neighbor is prudent, you see, and yet he is very rich, in very comfortable circumstances. His nest is well feathered, the rascal!"

"Then how can he propose to bet two sous?" said La Thomassinière; "it's beyond belief.—Ace, ace, and ace. You are robbed."

"What! does he admit that he has robbed us?" Monin asked his neighbor in an undertone.

"That means that we have lost.—Well, now for our revenge.—Aren't you betting, Madame Destival?"

"No, monsieur, I prefer to listen to the singing."

" Betting won't prevent you, madame; I don't lose a note while I am playing."

" Nor I," said La Thomassinière. " I am like Cato, I can easily do four things at once! "

" Haven't you any duets of Rossini's here, my dear? " inquired Athalie, running her fingers over the keys.

" Why, I don't know, but I think not."

" I think, madame, that I have had the pleasure of singing some of them with you here," said Dalville.

" Ah! you remember, do you, monsieur? "

" Here's a duet from *La Gazza*," said Athalie, after upsetting all the music on the piano; " let's try it, monsieur."

" Ace, and *passe carreau*!" cried Monsieur de la Thomassinière triumphantly, taking up the money that was on the table.

" What does *passe carreau* mean? " Monin asked Destival in a whisper.

" It means that we have lost, as you see."

" I don't know the terms of the game. That makes four sous that I've lost already."

" Make your bet."

" Allow me to see what the weather is, first. Oh! it's still raining very hard. I am in the game."

" Monsieur is lucky! "

" And then, too, I am pretty good at this game! " said La Thomassinière, leaning back in his chair.

" I believe that I play it rather well too," rejoined Destival, biting his lips angrily.

" Be quiet, messieurs! we can't hear each other sing! " said the sprightly Athalie, while Auguste sang: "*Il certo il mio periglio.*"

La Thomassinière beat time falsely with his foot, murmuring, to make believe that he understood Italian:

"Very pretty! exceedingly pretty! bravo! bravo! bravissimo!"

Whereupon Monin stooped and whispered to Destival:

"Does that mean that we have lost, too?"

"No, no! don't you hear them singing Italian? It's a duet by La Pie." *

"Oho! it's by La Pie!" Monin repeated, rolling his eyes about and taking out his snuff-box. "How does it happen, neighbor, that a *pie* writes a duet?"

"My dear Monin," said Destival testily, "please don't talk to me all the time; you see, you make me lose."

"What! I make you lose, although I am not playing?"

"Yes, yes, it confuses me. Bet again. I certainly am not a poor player, but when a person talks like that——"

"You see we've got a *pie* at home that talks finely, and I wanted to know—That makes eight sous I've lost."

"And I sixteen francs!"

"Bah! what does that amount to, messieurs?" said La Thomassinière; "if you played for handfuls of gold as I do, it would be all very well; that's what you can call gambling! I am very sorry to waste my luck for such small stakes.—Bravo! bravissimo! *Certo pio pio piu! Atoussimo!*"

La Thomassinière insisted on mixing Italian into everything that he said, and Destival forced himself to smile, as he felt in his pockets; but his gayety was forced, and his smiles were grimaces. The two singers exchanged melting glances as they executed together roulades and flourishes, which they prolonged inordinately, and during which Madame Destival coughed impatiently in the hope of disturbing the harmony that was rapidly becoming established between them.

* *Pie* in French means magpie.

Suddenly the door of the salon was thrown open; a stout woman of fifty or thereabouts, wearing a straw hat whose brim barely overpassed her forehead and upon which nodded a wreath of faded roses, entered the room with the air of a person in a towering rage, holding an umbrella in one hand, and in the other a reticule large enough to hold a ten pound loaf of sugar. At sight of her Monin started back, lost his wits, upset his snuff-box, and acted as if he proposed to hide himself under the table.

"Ah! so you're here, are you, monsieur?" cried Madame Monin, for it was that lady in person who had entered the salon. "I find you gambling. I suspected as much. I wish you good-evening, neighbors. While it's thundering and a frightful storm is raging, monsieur sits here gambling instead of coming home to comfort me; and yet he knows how afraid I am of thunder storms! Excuse me, neighbor, for venturing to scold him before you, but you must agree that his conduct is unpardonable."

During this sermon, poor Monin, who had no idea what he was doing, staked a forty-sou piece instead of two sous, and stuffed his fingers into his snuff-box, in which there was nothing at all, stammering the while with a contrite air:

"How's your health, Bichette?"

"My health! a lot you worry about it, on my word! To leave me alone during the storm! Catherine had to keep me company under the quilt."

"It was the rain that——"

"As if a man should be afraid of the rain! for shame! You make me blush!"

Madame Destival did not like Madame Monin; but, being overjoyed by her arrival at that moment, she gave

her a seat near the piano and overwhelmed her with attentions, to which Madame Monin replied by repeated curtseys, at the same time handing her husband the umbrella. He stepped forward to take it, and, forgetting that he was interested in the game, murmured so low that she could hardly hear him:

"Whenever you're ready, Bichette."

But Bichette, who was comfortably seated and was already beginning to criticise Madame de la Thomasinière, replied sharply:

"Now that I've come, do you think I propose to go right away again? That would be polite, wouldn't it? that would be worthy of you! I shall have the pleasure of chatting with my neighbor a minute, and listening to the music. I'm very fond of music."

"You sing, I believe—do you not, Madame Monin?" inquired Madame Destival eagerly.

"Oh! I used to sing; I had rather a good voice, too; but I've forgotten almost everything now except the duet from *Armide*: '*Aimons-nous! aimons-nous! tout nous y convie!*' That's so lovely! it will never grow old."

"I have the score of *Armide*; you must sing that for us with Monsieur Dalville."

"Oh! really, neighbor!"

"Do you hear the present that's to be given you?" whispered Athalie to Auguste.

"I am much obliged," replied Dalville; "upon my word, I don't know what I have done to Madame Destival to make her play such a trick on me."

"Don't be alarmed; if she forces you to sing the duet, I'll be your accompanist, and I promise you that three or four chords will be broken before the tenth measure."

"How good you are, and how deeply indebted I shall be to you!"

Monin, seeing that his wife had softened somewhat, made bold to say to her:

"You sing very nicely too that song about sheep: '*Margot filait tranquillement, ne pensant, ne rêvant qu'à son p'tit, p'tit, p'tit.*'"

"Hush, monsieur, and attend to your game, as you're so fond of gambling. Is it piquet they're playing there?"

"No, Bichette, écarté."

"What? écarté? And how long have you known écarté, monsieur?"

"I don't know it, but I was just going to tell you, I'm betting on it."

"Ah! you're betting, are you? Well, I trust that you are modest at least, and don't play for big stakes?"

"Oh, no! never fear, Bichette!"

"You have lost your forty sous, Monsieur Monin!" exclaimed Destival at that moment, heaving a deep sigh.

"Forty sous!" shouted Madame Monin, jumping from her chair with a violence that made all the furniture in the room tremble; "what's that? Monsieur Monin betting forty sous! Why, that is horrible! For heaven's sake, neighbor, what did you give him to drink at dinner?—What is the meaning of such extravagance, Monsieur Monin? Have you gone crazy?"

"No, Bichette, it's a mistake; I assure you that I didn't bet but two sous."

"You put forty sous on the table, monsieur," said La Thomassinière, "and they're lost."

"I had won a lot, you see," whispered Monin to his wife; "that was just my winnings."

"You must admit that I am playing in hard luck," said Destival; "that makes seven times that I have been responsible for Monin's losing."

"Seven times, monsieur! have you bet seven times in succession?" cried Madame Monin, glaring at her husband with the expression of a cat about to pounce upon a mouse.

"Why, no, Bichette; you know perfectly well that I am incapable of such a thing!"

"Here's the duet from *Armide*," said Madame Destival; "come, Monsieur Dalville, sing it with madame."

"I don't know it," said Auguste.

"Nonsense! you are enough of a musician to sing it at sight."

"I'll prompt you in your passages, monsieur," said Madame Monin, removing her hat lest it should interfere with her voice.

Madame Monin began. Her voice was almost enough to set one's teeth on edge. Monin applauded every measure. Suddenly a chord broke. The vivacious Athalie ran her fingers over the keys and seemed excited by the fire with which she was playing. Soon a second chord broke, then a third, and it was impossible to go on. Athalie left her seat, saying:

"What a pity! it was going so well!"

"That's the disadvantage of your pianos," said Madame Monin testily, as she put on her shepherdess's hat; "Monsieur Monin's little flute's the thing; there's no danger of that ever breaking, at all events."

"Do you want me to go and get it, Bichette?"

"Upon my word, this is a pretty time of night to make such a suggestion! We must go home to bed, monsieur; that will be much better than your little flute."

Destival left the card-table, red as a turkey-cock.

"I can't stand it any longer!" he cried. "That makes twelve times that he has passed! I've lost at least forty francs!"

"Oh! how can anyone risk so much money?" said Madame Monin. "If you should ever lose forty francs, Monsieur Monin, I'd have a separation at once."

"Here's a fine to-do over a trifle!" said La Thomas-sinière, rising from his chair; "I'll stake it on a single hand to-morrow, at a notary's, who's a friend of mine. That's where they play *écarté*! The table is covered with gold and bank-notes! Ah! there's some fun in that! But otherwise *écarté*'s a very stupid game.—Well! are we going to bed?"

"Go to bed, monsieur, who's preventing you?" said Athalie; "we don't need you."

"Faith, I am terribly sleepy."

"Baptiste will show you to your room, which is over this."

"And where is mine, my dear, if you please?" queried the *petite-maitresse*, as her husband went up to bed without bidding anyone good-night, because it was bad form.

"Yours, my dear?" rejoined Madame Destival; "why, with your husband; we have only one room to offer you."

"What! can it be by any chance that you are going to make me sleep with him?"

"Why, of course."

"Oh! that is absurd! Such a thing never occurred to me. I never sleep with Monsieur de la Thomas-sinière. I have my own suite, as you know."

"For once, *belle dame*," said Destival, with a sly expression, "our dear husband will not complain."

"*Mon Dieu*! how amusing!" exclaimed Athalie, sulkily. Meanwhile, Madame Monin, who had succeeded at last in tucking up her dress and putting on her shawl, said to Madame Destival with a simper:

"For my part, I sleep with my husband, and I should just like to hear him mention a separate room! Ha! ha!"

"You know perfectly well, Bichette, that I have no desire to——"

"All right, Monsieur Monin, I know what I know.—Good-night, neighbors.—Well, monsieur, why don't you put on your cap? What sort of way is that to act?"

Monin was afraid that his wife would discover the hole in his cap. He finally decided to wear it over his left ear, so that the top would be less visible to the eyes of his better half. And Madame Monin led her spouse away, promising him that she would never again let him dine out without her, because he was not careful of himself at the table, and wine made him plunge into all sorts of extravagance.

When his neighbors had gone, Monsieur Destival admitted that the drilling had fatigued him terribly, and he speedily vanished.

The music had cemented the intimacy between Dalville and the brilliant Athalie. With those who are capable of enjoying the charms of harmony, there is nothing that brings two hearts together so quickly as a sweet or tender ditty, or a passage overlaid with passion, which the performers often address to each other. Music is a very potent auxiliary in love; it stirs the emotions, it speaks to the soul. Thank heaven, almost all our ladies know how to play the piano now.

But Athalie rose, and Madame Destival escorted her to her apartment. Before going in, the *petite-maitresse* laughingly said to her friend:

"My dear, I must tell you something in confidence: I believe I've made a conquest of Monsieur Dalville."

"Do you think so?"

"I am almost sure of it; he has been talking to me in that veiled way,—you know what I mean; and then he squeezed my hand very tenderly."

"I congratulate you!"

"Oh! you understand that I mean to have a little sport with him, that's all."

"But I must tell you frankly that the conquest is of little value, for he is a man who falls in love with every woman he sees.—Adieu, my dear, good-night."

"Until to-morrow, my love! I shall get up early for a walk in the fields."

"I will go with you, my dear."

The ladies parted. Madame Destival went down to the salon, but Dalville was no longer there; he too had retired. So madame did the same and summoned Julie to undress her.

VI

THE COMPANY RETURNS TO PARIS

The night passed. Did its protecting darkness banish Madame Destival's irritation and her husband's fatigue? Did Dalville determine to be virtuous, and Bertrand to be sober? Did the sprightly Athalie become reconciled to the necessity of sharing her husband's bed, and did Monsieur de la Thomassinière sleep well beside his wife? These are mysteries which I am unable to solve.

All I know is that Madame Destival rose with her friend's pleasant confidence of the night before still in her mind, and that she said to herself as she dressed:

"The flirt did everything that she could to assure the conquest of Auguste. I saw all her simpering and smiles while they were singing. No doubt she hopes to receive

a declaration in due form this morning; but I am sorry for you, madame, for I shall be on the spot, I shall not let you out of my sight, I will not allow such intrigues to be carried on in my house. Oh! women are such coquettes nowadays!—I think I will put this rose in my hair; it's more becoming than a ribbon. *Mon Dieu!* how badly my curl-papers work to-day!—And then they complain because men think unfavorably of our sex. Why, don't they justify them in that opinion by acting as they do? At the very first meeting, to let a man see that one is attracted by him—shocking! And a woman of twenty, married two years at most! Ah! *Monsieur Auguste*, you don't deserve any friends."

Monsieur Destival, on laying aside the silk handkerchief that covered his head at night, took his stand in front of his mirror and presented arms with a vessel which he had forgotten to replace in the night-table. Forgetting that he was in his shirt, *Destival*, who had dreamed of exterminating all the beasts in the district, made the circuit of his chamber at the double-quick, and took aim at his bolster with the tongs. But in that martial posture the remembrance of the forty francs he had lost at *écarté* the night before presented itself to his mind, and as one cannot attend to business while practising the manual of arms, our friend recurred to more peaceable ideas and proceeded to dress, thinking of nothing but the best means to become as rich as *La Thomasinière*, so that he might be able to lose a few crowns at play without losing his temper.

Dalville dreamed a little of the fair *Athalie*, a little of the young milkmaid, a little of *Madame Destival*, also of some other persons; like one who has no exclusive sentiment in his heart, but allows himself to be led by all the sensations, all the illusions, all the whims of his

imagination. He rose without any well-defined plan of operations, without a determination to be more virtuous or more enterprising, without any intention of beginning a new intrigue. Chance should decide, he would act as circumstances might suggest, he would obey the dictates of his heart, or rather of pleasure. For a heedless fellow, that line of conduct was not devoid of wisdom; if to abandon oneself to the course of events, to lay no plans in advance, but to seize on the wing every opportunity to be happy—if that is heedlessness, it bears a strong resemblance to philosophy; in which there is nothing surprising, since extremes meet.

Bertrand had risen before dawn, always ready to carry out his master's orders, even when he did not approve of his conduct. The ex-corporal was well pleased with his repast of the preceding night, because the beaune was not spared, and Baptiste and Tony and the tall lackeys, while drinking with him, listened with respectful attention to his stories of his campaigns. He was walking on the terrace, ready to give Monsieur Destival a lesson in the manual, and perfectly reconciled to the life that people lead in the country.

The petite-maitresse, whose head was as light as her heart, had risen very early, before her husband was awake. She had slept badly; innumerable thoughts crowded into her mind, but the principal one was as always the desire to attract, to make a sensation; that was the fixed point about which her other sentiments revolved by the force of gravitation, without disturbing the course of the planet whose satellites they were.

As for Monsieur de la Thomassinière, he had slept without waking, and in his dreams had imagined himself the *seigneur* of a department, decorated with three crosses, a broad ribbon and a star, and richer, more

conceited and more insolent than ever. Then he had found himself abruptly transported to the wine-shop of the *Learned Ass*, serving wine to peasants who treated him most cavalierly. That infernal sleep has no respect for anything; it displaces the most powerful men, and effects strange revolutions; it transforms a king into a shepherd, and sometimes raises the plowman to a throne; it confounds the great lord with the humblest plebeian; it makes of a minister of state a poor devil without bread or work or resource, starving in a garret; it transforms the banker into a petty clerk working fourteen hours a day to earn three francs; the poet who sells his pen, into a juggler employed to perform tricks before an audience which pays and despises him. To the kept woman it shows the hospital, to the public harlot, La Salpêtrière, to the young men who frequent roulette tables, the galleys or the nets of Saint-Cloud. It reminds the parvenu of his birth, the public official of the acts of injustice he has committed, the man without sense of honor of the insults he has endured. And all these people do as Monsieur de la Thomassinière did: they awake shrieking that they have a nightmare, and they ascribe those horrid dreams to a bad digestion. They would be very sorry to seek therein a memory of the past and a lesson for the future.

There was no trace of the storm of the preceding evening. The sky was clear, and the country seemed lovelier than ever; the trees glistened with a brilliant green undimmed by dust, the flowers were fresher, the brooks more noisy; everything invited one to enjoy the charms of nature; and that doubtless was the reason that Auguste was already in the garden, standing in the gateway leading into the courtyard, undecided whether he should go for a walk in the fields or remain on the

premises. Meanwhile, Athalie had taken a seat under a clump of trees at the end of the garden; she was occupied in arranging some flowers, but her glance constantly wandered to right and left to see if someone was coming to bear her company; while Madame Destival strolled along an adjacent alley ready to join the persons whom she expected to meet in the garden.

Suddenly Auguste heard a voice that was not unknown to him crying:

"Whoa, White Jean! whoa, I say! Have you forgotten that we stop here?"

And at the same instant a milkmaid with her tin cans entered Monsieur Destival's courtyard. Auguste uttered an exclamation of delight when he recognized Denise, and hurried across the courtyard to meet the pretty milkmaid.

"It is really you, lovely Denise!"

"Yes, monsieur, it's I. Didn't I tell you yesterday that I came here every morning to bring milk? I'm very glad to see you again, monsieur."

"Really, Denise, did you want to see me?"

"Yes, monsieur, I wanted to ever so. Oh! that was such a nice thing you did! it was so generous! and even if you do have a little too much blarney with us girls, no matter—I let it go on account of that."

"Bless my soul! what on earth have I done, Denise, to bring down all these compliments on my head?"

"What about Coco, and his soup-bowl, and his old grandmother—don't you remember them?"

"How do you know so much, Denise?"

"Pardi! as if everything wasn't known in the country! The old grandma'am came to the village to buy some things. Coco came with her, and he told everybody that a fine gentleman had given him money to buy another

bowl. The grandmother described you, and I knew you right away. It's too bad that Père Calieux is such a drunkard; he passed the whole night in the wine-shop drinking up the crown piece you gave him, and he'll soon get away with the money you left for Coco too. But that ain't your fault, and you were mighty kind to 'em."

"I did nothing except what was perfectly natural, Denise, and I am well rewarded at this moment."

Denise had become more and more animated as she told Auguste what she knew, and the young man's glances made her blush more than ever. She lowered her eyes and smiled, and stood for some moments before the man who was gazing at her, her arms hanging at her sides. Her awkwardness, her embarrassment and her coarse woolen skirt made the charms of her pretty face even more alluring.

At last she took up her cans, which she had placed on the ground, and said:

"I must take this milk to Mamzelle Julie; she's generally up by this time."

"One moment, Denise, I beg you."

"Have you got anything to say to me, monsieur?"

"Oh, yes! In the first place, you look even prettier this morning than you did yesterday."

"Oh! if that's all it is, I may as well go."

"One instant, Denise, please; I feel that the more I see you, the more I love you!"

"Well, then, you mustn't see me any more, monsieur."

"Does it make you angry to have me love you?"

"Oh no! for I'm pretty sure it ain't dangerous."

"If you would listen to me——"

"Adieu, monsieur."

And Denise started to walk away. But Auguste took her hand and stopped her, gazing tenderly at her,—too

tenderly for a fickle youth who gazed so at all pretty women. A seducer's eyes should express nothing but inconstancy; unluckily, the eyes lend themselves to every sort of scheme. But perhaps Dalville was moved at that moment by genuine feeling, who knows? Who can read the human heart?

At this juncture Bertrand entered the courtyard; he approached his master, unseen by him, and said:

"Did I hear monsieur call me?"

"Why, no! I didn't call you," replied Auguste angrily, dropping Denise's hand; "you always appear at the wrong time. Is it proper to interrupt people when they are talking together?"

"Pardon, lieutenant, I didn't hear you say anything; I didn't know people talked without speaking."

"Leave us, Bertrand."

Bertrand made a half wheel to the left and went toward the garden; but as he passed Denise, who, although she said that she was going, did not go, and seemed very busy with her little cheeses, the corporal said to her in an undertone:

"Look out for yourself!"

Auguste once more approached Denise, who had started in surprise at Bertrand's words.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing, monsieur, but I must go."

"Will you do me a favor, Denise?"

"Oh, yes! with pleasure, monsieur, if it's anything I can do."

"I have taken a liking to that child I met on the road yesterday. His pretty face, his little honest way, everything speaks in his favor."

"You mean Coco Calleux?"

"Yes."

"I'm fond of him, too, but the poor little fellow's had a hard time since he lost his mother. His grandmother's rough and cross, and his father's a drunkard, and they want that child, only six years old, to go to work so soon! Can you imagine such a thing? Why, he often has nothing but bread to eat, and he's lucky when he doesn't have a beating for his supper. So we in the village don't like that drunken pig of a Calleux, and if the cottage wasn't some distance from the village, Coco would be at our house more than he's at home, I tell you."

"Well, Denise, be good enough to keep an eye on the child and buy him whatever he needs—in short, take my place with him, will you?"

"Oh! with pleasure, monsieur!"

"Here, take this purse, and use the contents to the best advantage for my little protégé. When that is gone, I'll give you more. I shall always approve whatever use you may make of it."

"Ah! you've got a kind heart, monsieur! How glad I am! But such a lot of money as this will last a long time."

"You will do me this favor, won't you?"

"Will I! Pardi! I should say so! Don't you think it's pleasant to be employed to do good? Who could refuse such a commission?—I say, monsieur, I must kiss you for this—do you want me to?"

"Do I want you to, Denise!"

Auguste already had his arms around the girl, and had deposited more than one kiss on the plump cheeks which she offered him with pleasure, when an exclamation and a burst of laughter reached their ears simultaneously. Dalville turned: Madame Destival and Madame de la Thomassinière stood behind him.

"Oh! this is too much!" cried Madame Destival, walking forward with a wrathful glance at Denise, while Athalie continued to laugh, albeit her laughter seemed slightly forced.

"Delicious!" she said. "What! even with milkmaids? I shall remember this! the picture was truly rural."

Denise was not disturbed, for she had no thought that she could be blamed; so she looked at the two ladies in amazement, trying to divine the cause of the merriment of the one and the anger that gleamed in the eyes of the other, and still holding in her hand the purse that the young man had given her.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Madame Destival, with a contemptuous glance at the young milkmaid.

"As you see, madame, I have brought cheese and milk as usual."

"I didn't order any cheeses of you; in fact, yours are bitter, and I don't want any more of them. As for your milk, you put water in it, and I propose to take mine of somebody else."

"Water in my milk!" cried Denise, whose eyes filled with tears when she heard her merchandise thus vilified. "You're the first person that ever said that, madame, I tell you! And I swear——"

"All right, mademoiselle, that's enough; I don't want you ever to set foot inside my doors again. I thought that you were a decent, virtuous girl; I don't like little hussies."

"Hussies! Mon Dieu! what have I done to madame?"

"We saw it all, mademoiselle. And that purse in your hand is proof enough."

"That purse, madame," said Auguste, walking to Denise's side, "is destined for a charitable purpose, to relieve an unfortunate person. But I see that an evil interpretation is always put upon everything.—Poor Denise! I am responsible for your being made wretched! And when, by chance, I attempt to do a good deed, they think that I am trying to seduce you.—Do you suppose, mesdames, that one wins the love of a milkmaid with money? Remember, please, that this is not Paris."

While Auguste was speaking, Denise became calm; she wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and recovered sufficient assurance to say to Madame Destival:

"I ought not to cry at what you said to me, madame, for I haven't done anything to be ashamed of.—Adieu, monsieur; I'll take your money and try to carry out your kind intentions."

With that, Denise curtsied to the company, and, still choking back her sobs, returned to White Jean and left the business agent's house.

Madame Destival, conscious of some embarrassment, returned to the garden. Athalie walked up to Auguste and said, with a laugh:

"You must admit, monsieur, that you kissed her at least six times in succession."

"I didn't count, madame."

"You seemed to like it."

"Very much, madame."

"Monsieur is frank, at all events."

"That is, perhaps, my one good quality."

"But why did you kiss her?"

"Is she not very pretty, madame?"

"Pretty! perhaps; as coarse, rustic beauties go."

"No, no! on the contrary, her features are extremely delicate."

"But she's a milkmaid!"

"What difference do you see between a pretty country girl and a pretty city girl?"

"Why, an enormous difference, monsieur. What about education, good manners, and refinement—do you count all those as nothing? Would you go out in Paris, or even in the country, with a milkmaid on your arm?"

"No, madame, I admit that I should not be enough of a philosopher for that. But just put on Denise——"

"Who is Denise, pray?"

"This little milkmaid, madame."

"Oho! so monsieur knows her name?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, monsieur, what do you propose to put on Mademoiselle Denise?"

"A pretty hat, a stylish dress, a handsome shawl——"

"Ah! she would cut a strange figure in all those things!"

"Mon Dieu, madame, habit is everything. You yourself, despite all your charms, might be awkward in a milkmaid's cap. Those things that can be acquired, madame, are of little worth; but the things that are innate are beauty, grace, intellect, a sweet voice and glance and smile—in a word, the charm which takes us captive and which you possess in such abundant measure, madame."

"Ah! you did well to end in that way; if you had not I should have been angry. Madame Destival is right; you are a ne'er-do-well, a dangerous man. By the way, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you in Paris, monsieur; I often give balls, and I have a reception every Thursday in winter."

"Madame is too kind; but your husband has said nothing to me."

"Mon Dieu! has he any time to think to invite people? He is so distraught, so engrossed by his speculations, that I alone attend to the invitations. Will you come?"

"Is it not absolutely necessary for me to see you again? If I should yield to my inclinations, I would never leave you."

"Bless my soul! I believe that we are dropping into sentiment. Are you going to make me a declaration?"

"Is it possible to see you without loving you?"

"Look out! you are becoming serious, and I like none but merry people. That melancholy air doesn't suit you."

"Have you no pity, then, for the pain you cause?"

"Oh! not the least! Sighs do not move me an inch; to please me, it is necessary to keep me laughing constantly."

While they talked, Auguste and his companion had strayed into the shaded portion of the garden. He had taken the young woman's arm and was pressing it tenderly. Athalie was still laughing, but was making no effort to avoid Dalville's gentle caresses, when Bertrand appeared before them at a bend in the path.

"They are waiting for you and madame at breakfast, lieutenant," said the corporal, putting the back of his hand to his forehead.

Auguste stamped on the ground impatiently; but the vivacious Athalie had already dropped his arm and was frisking away.

"Parbleu! you are exceedingly awkward, Bertrand!" said Auguste, glaring at the corporal, who still stood before him.

"What have I done, lieutenant?"

"You seem to have made it your business to disturb me when I am engaged in an interesting conversation with a pretty woman."

"Excuse me, lieutenant, but I can't tell what you're saying."

"A shrewd man can guess it at a glance. Once for all, when I am alone with a woman, I forbid you to interrupt me."

"That settles it, lieutenant; if the house should burn down, I wouldn't disturb you."

The whole party had assembled in the dining-room; even La Thomassinière, having waked with a tremendous appetite, had not devised any previous business which would have vexed his stomach, and he bestowed a most affable nod upon Dalville, which meant that his wife had informed him that she proposed to receive the young man at their house. Madame Destival too seemed desirous to be reconciled to Auguste, who had treated her coldly since the scene in the courtyard.

"I must be in Paris before noon," said La Thomassinière, shuffling a mass of papers that he took from his wallet; "I have ten appointments for to-day. I am sure that at least twenty people have called at my house before this. A little more coffee, if you please. It isn't Mocha——"

"I beg your pardon," said Destival, as he poured out some for him.

"Oh, no! I assure you that isn't; I know what I am talking about. I laid in lately a *consequential* supply; it's very different from this."

"I must be in Paris this morning," said Destival, puffing himself out; "I have numerous matters on the carpet, some of great importance! Monin wants to buy a house, and I have just what he wants."

"Who's he? that little man who bet two sous at écarté?"

"The very same."

"What! that fellow buy houses! I shouldn't have suspected it; his coat was very threadbare—and patched on the elbows."

"Oh! that means nothing in the country."

"Never mind! you must admit that a man in a threadbare coat doesn't promise great things—it doesn't give you a very exalted idea of his wit. Oh! I have a keen glance, I have; and then, being used to seeing only rich and well-dressed people,—I say, footman, just tell my people to harness up, to put my horses to my calèche."

"I expect my milliner this morning," said Athalie; "she is to bring me the sweetest bonnet. We must go at full speed, monsieur, for I am very anxious to try on that bonnet."

"You are aware, madame, that my steeds do not travel like cab-horses. I feed them rather well, and they cost me so much that I can afford to make them gallop."

"Baptiste," Monsieur Destival called to his servant, who was leaving the room, "you will hitch up too, do you understand?"

"That's the way," muttered Baptiste, "no sooner out of the kitchen than I must go to the stable!"

"I say, Baptiste, while you're about it, tell my little Tony to put the horse to my cabriolet," said Dalville, smiling at the pompous air of La Thomassinière, who said, rubbing his hands:

"On my word, it's very pleasant for each to have his own carriage; it's very genteel; one is certain at all events that one is with *comme il faut* people. To be sure, you have only cabriolets, but everybody can't have a calèche, a coupé and a landau, like me."

"What, are you going too, Monsieur Dalville?" asked Madame Destival, with a most expressive glance at the young man; "this is polite, everybody abandons me!"

"It is a fact, my dear fellow," said Destival, "that my wife relied on you to keep her company, and——"

"I never said that I relied on monsieur; most assuredly I should not have dreamed of saying such a thing!" said Emilie, interrupting her husband; "but as everybody else is going to Paris, I don't see why I should stay here. Besides, you are to give a dinner this week, aren't you, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame, a large dinner. I shall have some influential people,—government officials and distinguished artists. I count upon Monsieur and Madame de la Thomassinière, and upon friend Dalville too."

Dalville bowed simply, but La Thomassinière replied:

"We will see. I can't promise beforehand, because I may be invited to other dinners by people high up on the ladder, and you must see——"

"So we are all going to Paris," said Madame Destival. "My husband will take Baptiste and Julie with him. Will Monsieur Dalville be kind enough to give me a seat in his cabriolet?"

"Why can't you come in our calèche?" hastily inquired the petite-maitresse.

"Oh! I am afraid that I should keep you waiting. I have several matters to attend to, and you are in a hurry to see your milliner. Monsieur Dalville will not object, I trust, to give me another half hour."

Auguste realized that it would be discourteous to refuse; moreover, although that arrangement upset his plans, although the fascinating Athalie made an enticing little pout at him, and although Madame Destival had said many unkind things about him, still, Emilie was a good-looking woman none the less, and one forgives a good-looking woman many things, even when one is no longer in love with her.

They left the table. The carriages were ready. Madame de la Thomassinière entered her calèche, with a malevolent glance at Auguste and Madame Destival. The speculator called his two servants, who assisted him to climb in; then he threw himself back on the seat, crying:

"To my house in the Chaussée-d'Antin, and go at full speed; drive *furiously*, do you hear, Lafleur? But look out and not run into anything."

The calèche flew away like an arrow. Madame Destival had hurried her domestics to such purpose that Julie and Baptiste were soon ready to start with their master. But madame still had divers matters to attend to, for which she did not need Julie. Monsieur Destival shook hands cordially with his friend and urged him not to drive his wife too fast, because it was bad for the nerves; then he took his seat in the cabriolet beside Julie, ordering Baptiste to mount behind, which he did, muttering because they made him do all sorts of things.

Bertrand and Tony stood by Dalville's cabriolet, awaiting the latter and Madame Destival. But the little matters which the mistress of the house had to arrange took nearly two hours. Bertrand fretted and fumed at having to stand beside the cabriolet; but his master had ordered him to await him there, and he did not leave his post.

"Perhaps monsieur thinks we've gone," suggested little Tony.

"No, no, he knows we're here."

"But perhaps he don't mean to go back to Paris to-day."

"Then he'll come and tell us so."

"And suppose he don't think of it?"

"We will stay here until somebody comes to relieve us from duty. I've got my orders, that's enough for me."

At last, about noon, Auguste appeared with Madame Destival on his arm. She leaned tenderly upon him and her face expressed nothing save satisfaction and the most amiable unconstraint.

"It's strange!" thought Bertrand, "here's a lady that changes her face three or four times a day. However, I ought to be used to it. I've seen so many women like that. Everyone that comes to see monsieur as angry as you please, rolling her eyes, and talking loud, is as mild and gentle as a lamb when she leaves him; she hasn't the same face, nor the same eyes, nor the same voice."

"Come, Bertrand, get in," said Auguste, who was already in the cabriolet with Madame Destival.—"You will be a little crowded, madame; but my faithful Bertrand isn't built to ride behind."

"Oh! I shall be very comfortable," said Emilie, bestowing a soft glance on Auguste, and on Bertrand an affable smile; for nobody can be so amiable as our fair friends when things are going to suit them! But when you thwart them——

They drove away. When they passed the little path leading to Montfermeil, Auguste put out his head and looked, saying to himself:

"I shall not always have a lady to drive to Paris."

VII

THE VILLAGE

Denise started to return to her village; but she did not sing as her custom was, as she walked behind White Jean. Her heart was still heavy because of what had taken place at Madame Destival's; and although she had tried not to seem distressed, she did not forget the word—*hussy*—that had been applied to her. To be called by such a name as that, when she was virtuous, when she had nothing for which to reproach herself, seemed very hard to the little milkmaid. It is said that unmerited insults do not wound; but how can an honest and sincere heart fail to feel outraged on receiving epithets usually reserved for vice? It might much better be said that it is the vicious person who does not blush and who laughs at anything that may be said to her, because she retains no sense of shame. In my opinion the proverb "Only the truth gives offence" is essentially false.

"How unkind those city people are!" thought the girl; "the idea of calling me a hussy! That sounds well from them! What did I do to deserve it? I kissed that gentleman because he's got a kind heart, and because he's going to look out for Coco; it seems to me that was no more than natural, and I ain't ashamed of it. That Madame Destival, who came rushing at me with such a scowl! I thought she was going to hit me.—The idea of telling me that my cheeses are bitter, and that I put water in my milk! Ah! I felt just like crying, but I did well to keep

the tears back, she'd have been too pleased to see them. And that other one, who did nothing but laugh and make all sorts of faces and monkey tricks at that young man! Mon Dieu! as if I had done anything to make such a fuss about! Should I have refused that money when it was to help that poor boy? No, indeed! and it would have made the gentleman angry, and I'd much rather make the lady angry. He isn't wicked, he's only a flatterer. Well! that ain't a crime—all one has to do is not to listen, that's all. And he's very nice and polite. I clawed his face and he didn't get mad. By the way, he didn't tell me his name. Why should he? I don't need to know it. Perhaps he told Coco—I must ask him.—Go on, White Jean!—Shall I show my aunt this purse? Yes, I'll tell her the whole thing. But I didn't tell her yesterday about my fall, and what that gentleman saw. When I think of that, it troubles me, and I want to cry again. And that other gentleman, who calls him lieutenant, and who whispered 'Look out for yourself!' when he passed me. His name's Bertrand, I remember that. He looks like a good fellow, that Bertrand; but what in the deuce did he mean with his 'Look out for yourself'?"

Meditating thus, Denise arrived at Montfermeil, a pretty little village where the people are not badly off; where there are several comfortable bourgeois houses, and nothing to indicate want, because the occupant of the humblest cottage works instead of begging.

Denise's cottage was at the end of the village, on the bank of a little stream that followed a winding course between rows of willows. It was of two stories; the walls were sound, and the roof was covered with tiles, which gave the cottage a certain air of elegance. There was a yard in front, separated from the street by a low wooden fence; the stable was at the right, and hens, chickens and

ducks wandered about the yard, which they seemed to look upon as their property, giving vent to all sorts of cries when any other person than Denise or her aunt ventured to enter. The garden was behind the house; it was about two acres in extent, but there was no semblance of order; fruit and vegetables grew in confusion, according to the custom of the peasant, who thinks first of the useful. There were not many flowers, but as Denise was fond of them, there were a few rose-bushes among the potatoes, and now and then a syringa, its branches enlacing the trunk of a plum or an almond tree.

It will be evident from these details that the cottage did not belong to poor people. Everything about it indicated the possession of a competence; and in fact Mère Fourcy, Denise's aunt, was one of the richest peasants in the neighborhood; she owned two pieces of land, one of which was on the other side of the stream that flowed by her house; and Denise, who was her sole heir, was able by her activity and her little trade in milk and cheese, to add to the income of her aunt, who, although she was a worthy woman, was a little inclined to be miserly. That is said to be a failing of the rich; indeed, how can you expect those who have nothing to exhibit such a failing?

White Jean entered the yard without guidance, and headed for his stable. Denise was a little distance behind, having been stopped by some of her neighbors, who, as the custom is in villages, talked with every passer-by, because everybody knew everybody else. But the little milkmaid, who was in no mood for talking, hastened after White Jean, and relieved him of the baskets containing the milk and cheese that she brought back.

"What will my aunt say when she sees that I've brought these things back?" Denise asked herself; and

she could not restrain a sigh. But Denise did not fear her aunt, for Mère Fourcy, knowing her niece's virtue, and considering that she knew more than all the other people in the village, always approved what she said and did, except when it was a matter of lending money. That is why Denise, despite her fondness for Coco, had been able to do very little for him.

"His father's a drunkard," Mère Fourcy would say; "to give the child money is just giving that good-for-nothing Calleux the means of drinking."

Mère Fourcy was a stout woman of fifty-five, who, despite her corpulence, was active and alert; she heard her niece come in, and came downstairs to help her unload her ass.

"What have you got there, my child?" she asked.

"The cheeses I made for Madame Destival."

"Why didn't she take 'em?"

"Because—because she didn't want 'em."

"Oh! that's different.—What! all this milk too?"

"Oh, dear! yes, aunt."

"And I wouldn't let Monsieur Brichard have any this morning!"

"Oh! we'll use it up, aunt."

"Has Madame Destival taken her trade away from you?"

"Yes, aunt."

"That's what makes you look so cut up then. Where does she expect to get better milk?"

"Oh! it ain't on account of the milk, aunt."

"On account of something else, is it?"

"Yes, aunt."

"That makes a difference. Tell me about this other thing, my child."

Denise thought a moment, then replied:

"You know, aunt, I told you yesterday that I met a fine gentleman who asked me the way to Monsieur Destival's?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And that it was the same man who gave a lot of money to Coco's grandmother, because Coco broke the soup-bowl?"

"Yes, yes, I know. That sot of a Calleux will drink it all up."

"Well, aunt, I saw that young man again this morning, at Monsieur Destival's."

"So he's a young man, is he? You said a gentleman yesterday."

"Bless me! so he is, a gentleman who is young."

"Oh! that makes a difference."

"He was very pleasant and friendly with me, and when he learned from me that Père Calleux spent all the money, he gave me this purse and told me to see that poor Coco has everything he needs. I took it, aunt; did I do wrong?"

"Of course not, my dear; as if you didn't always do right, dear Denise. Well! you're a good girl too, and you don't let the men talk nonsense to you."

"No, indeed, aunt; but I let that gentleman kiss me."

"Oh! that makes a difference. What did he want to kiss you for?"

"To thank me for agreeing to look after Coco, for he's very fond of him."

"Well, I don't see any harm in all that, my child."

"But Madame Destival did, for she came up to me in a rage and called me——"

"She called you——?"

"Oh! I don't want to repeat the horrid word.—Well! she called me a—a—hussy."

"God in heaven! my niece, my Denise, a hussy! the virtuouslest girl within ten leagues! And you didn't jump at her face?"

"No, aunt; I just said that it was horrible to believe—to think—then I came home with my milk and my cheese."

"You did right, my child, you did right; those folks don't deserve to eat such good things."

Denise did not tell her aunt what Madame Destival had said about her milk and cheese, because Mère Fourcy would be just the woman to go to the business agent and demand satisfaction for such an insult. The girl did not like quarrelling and she wished never to hear Madame Destival's name again. Mère Fourcy went to the village to try to find customers for the milk and cheese. When she was alone, Denise took out the purse and counted its contents in her apron. There were twelve twenty-franc pieces, and six of five francs.

"Two hundred and seventy francs!" exclaimed Denise, throwing up her hands in amazement; "why, that's quite a lot of money. That gentleman must be very rich to give away so much all at once. Perhaps I ought not to have taken it all. But still, as it's for Coco—there's enough to send him to school, to have him learn to read. Yes, but his father don't want him to learn to read. That's a pity, I should like so much to make Coco a gentlemanly, well-taught boy; it would please that gentleman when he comes back—for he'll come to see his little boy; at least, he said he would. Never mind, I'll be very careful of the money; and while I have the time, I think I'll go to the cottage and see if they've done what that gentleman intended they should."

By taking crossroads, one could go in a quarter of an hour from Montfermeil to the home of the Calleux

family. Denise walked rapidly along the paths, which were well known to her. She entered the wretched hovel. Coco was seated at a table with old Madeleine. They were dining without Père Calieux, who, finding himself in funds, preferred the wine-shop to his house.

At sight of Denise, the child gave a joyful cry and ran to her. Denise was so good to him! she always brought him something nice; she often prevented his being beaten; in short, she showed great affection for him; and children love those who love them; it is not always so with men.

"Good-day, little Denise!" said Coco, opening his arms to the girl.

"Take care, good-for-nothing!" said old Madeleine; "you almost upset the table and spilt my soup! I'd have given you a good licking, if you had!"

Denise glanced about the hovel, and saw that the only change that Dalville's money had wrought was the presence of a large new bowl, which was in front of the fire. The child's bed was no softer than before.

"See how fine I am, Denise!" cried the child, exhibiting the trousers and the little brown jacket which replaced the ragged garments that covered him on the preceding day.

"Yes, I see," said Denise, scrutinizing the garments, "but none of these things are new."

"Pardi!" cried old Madeleine, "do you s'pose we was going to have 'em made to order for him? The things are good enough for a brat as plays all the time like him. You'll see in a day or two! they'll soon be full of holes! Ah! he'd wear out clothes made of iron."

"But why didn't you buy him a mattress, Mère Madeleine? I thought that gentleman told you to when he gave you the money."

"Because his father wouldn't have it; he says a boy hadn't ought to be coddled so, because it keeps 'em from getting strong."

"Still, when the money was given for Coco——"

"For Coco? yes, and for us too, my girl; hadn't the parents ought to come before the children?"

"Is Père Calieux in the field?"

"In the fields! oh, yes! in the fields indeed! He's at Claude's wine-shop. He took all there was left of the money that gentleman give me, and told me he was going to put it into some great undertakin'. Oh, yes! I know all about that; he'll undertake to drink it all up in a day, if it's possible."

"Would you like to have me take Coco away with me till night, Mère Madeleine?"

"No, my girl, no; I'm an old woman, and I don't want to be left alone. Coco's got to stay with me."

Denise kissed the child, who ran off to play and roll on the ground with his goat; then she returned to the village, asking herself:

"How shall I go to work to do what that gentleman wants done?"

The next day was Sunday. No work in the village. The women paid more attention to their toilet, they donned their prettiest gowns, and in the evening the whole population assembled on a beautiful greensward shaded by oaks and walnuts. There a wretched violin and a huge tambourine played for the young men and women to dance; they considered the orchestra divine, because it gave the signal for their enjoyment. Denise was the favorite among the young men, and aroused some jealous pangs in the hearts of her companions. The passions insinuate themselves everywhere; there are envious and evil-speaking folk in the village as well as in

the city; but they are less skilled in disguising their sentiments.

Denise was the prettiest girl in the village and in the country roundabout; that was what all the men said; but all the women did not agree. Denise was no coquette, but she was a woman; and what woman is there who is not conscious of a secret pleasure in the certainty that she is attractive, that she can prevail over her companions? But Denise did not play the coquette with the young men; she did not bestow a smile upon this one, a glance upon that one, a word of hope upon the other; but she laughed and joked and was pleasant to one and all alike; for she was very fond of dancing, and she liked to have everyone invite her to dance.

On the Sunday in question, however, Denise, who had gone to the green with her aunt, as usual, did not seem to enjoy herself so much as she ordinarily did; she laughed less with the young men and seemed not to take any pleasure in dancing. And finally, a thing that had never been seen before, Denise, after four contradances, declared that she was tired and would like to rest a while.

"Is it because you're sick, my child?" Mère Fourcy asked her niece, when she came and seated herself by her side.

"No, aunt, I ain't sick, but I'm tired."

"Tired! you! the greatest dancer in the whole country!"

"Well! I guess one gets tired of everything, aunt. I don't feel in the mood to-day."

"That makes a difference."

"Come on, Mamzelle Denise, come and have a dance," several young men said to the little milkmaid. And one of them pulled her arm until he almost dislocated it, another struck his palm against hers with all his might,

and a third, while saluting her, trod on her feet. With such delicate attentions it is customary to pay court to a village belle, who sometimes retorts by a ringing slap on the gallant's face, thereby indicating that he is in her good graces.

But Denise distributed no slaps among the youths who surrounded her; she simply sent them away, saying:

"Let me alone, when I tell you that I don't want to dance."

"Oh, yes, you do! oh, yes! She'll dance—you'll dance—she's joking when she says that."

But Denise held her ground, and when the dancers had taken their leave, she said to her aunt:

"Bless my soul! how stupid they all are!"

"Who, my girl?"

"Why Gros-Jean and Lucas and Bastien."

"They're the sharpest fellows in the village! What are you thinking about, to say that? Gros-Jean, who's so funny when he dances and always mixes up the figures on purpose! Lucas, who's taken the prize at *goose* three years running! And Bastien, who's been to Paris twice and learned to play at quarter-staff! And you call those boys stupid!"

"Bless me! aunt, it seemed to me that they didn't say anything to me but things that didn't amuse me."

"But you used to laugh so loud with 'em! I tell you you're sick, my child; when we go home, I'm going to make you eat a good dish of peas and pork before you go to bed; that'll do you good."

Denise did not feel sick; she did not herself know why she was not enjoying herself. At last the hour for retiring arrived, and the girl was secretly well pleased to return to the cottage and leave her companions, who glanced sneeringly at her and said to one another:

"Something's the matter with Denise, that's sure! At all events, if she's always the way she is to-day, the fellows will soon give up liking her and making love to her."

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the dish of peas and pork, Denise slept little. She thought, not precisely of the fine gentleman who had flattered her and kissed her and picked her up after her fall, but of the one who proposed to take care of poor Coco; of the money of which she was the depositary, and of the means of making the child happier.

At daybreak she left her bed. After completing her morning chores, she made her escape and hurried to the Calleux cabin. She saw the child playing in front of the door and was delighted to speak to him without witnesses.

"Where's Madeleine?" she asked.

"She's asleep, my little Denise," the child replied, throwing his arms about the girl's neck.

"And your father?"

"Papa Calleux, he didn't come home last night. Grandma says he slept at the wine-shop."

"Coco, do you love that gentleman who came here and left money for you, and kept you from being beaten for breaking the bowl?"

"Oh, yes! I do love him, just. He's got a pretty vest and a pretty ribbon hanging on it. He's coming to play with me again, ain't he?"

"Yes, he said he'd come again. Do you know his name?"

"He's my dear friend."

"But his name—did he tell you that?"

"No, but he knows my name's Coco, and Papa Calleux——"

"You must love that gentleman dearly, for he means to do ever so much for you. Would you like to learn to read and write?"

"Oh, yes! so's to read pretty stories in the books with pictures in 'em, like you've got. But papa won't let me go to school."

"I'll speak to him and try to make him consent——"

At that moment old Madeleine's shrill voice was heard, calling the child. He kissed Denise and went into the cabin, while the girl walked rapidly back to the village.

Père Calleux, after passing three days at the wine-shop, resumed his spade and watering-pot; but he would not consent to let Coco go to school, although Denise told him that it would cost him nothing; and old Madeleine would not allow the child to go any farther than the field where his father worked. Denise went to the hovel every morning; she always carried something secretly to the child, but she did not touch Dalville's money.

"He won't come back," said Denise to herself; "here's a week gone already! Psha! he's forgotten all about—Coco; still another reason for saving that money. Some day the little fellow will be very glad to have it. And yet that gentleman seemed to want to come again. Of course he's been to Madame Destival's, and he didn't go through our village! What liars they are, those young men from Paris! Still that one has some good qualities. But why did that Monsieur Bertrand tell me to look out for myself?"

The dancing days came around in due course, but Denise's good spirits did not return, although she did her utmost to appear as of old, and often danced when she felt no desire to do so, and tried to joke with the young men. Her greatest pleasure now was to sit alone under a great oak in her garden, or to go to the cabin and

embrace Coco, to whom she talked constantly of the handsome gentleman, who meant to do so much for him.

A month had passed since Auguste's meeting with Denise, when one morning, as she was about to start for the cabin, a peasant informed her that old Madeleine had died during the night. The little milkmaid ran to the child at full speed. The old woman's remains had not been removed; and as Calleux was poor and was not liked in the neighborhood, the child was watching alone by the body, while his father made the necessary arrangements for the burial.

Denise halted in front of the solitary hovel, the aspect of which seemed to her more wretched than ever, because Death casts a dark pall over everything wherever he passes. The girl was surprised to find nobody about; she drew nearer and bursts of laughter fell upon her ears. She concluded that the person was mistaken who had told her of the grandmother's death, and she put her head in at the door. She saw the death bed, beside which a lamp cast a dim light; and close by she saw the child playing with his goat on the straw, and greeting with shouts of laughter Jacqueline's antics and caresses.

That picture caused Denise a peculiar sensation. She entered the cabin and walked toward the child, saying:

"What's this, my dear? playing beside your dead grandmother?"

"Will that make her mad?" queried the child, with an artless glance at Denise.

"No, for she can't hear you; but you ought to be sorry for her death."

"Someone told me she wouldn't whip me again."

"Didn't you cry when she died?"

"No, Denise."

"Then you didn't love her?"

"Oh! I was awful 'fraid of her!"

"My dear, it isn't nice not to have any feeling."

"Oh! if my goat died, Denise, I'd cry hard enough; Jacqueline's so good and she loves me so!"

Denise could think of no answer to make to the child; she sent him outside with his goat. On Père Calieux's return, she obtained his permission to take Coco with her for a few days, and Coco took with him his darling goat, from which he refused to part.

Denise was anxious to keep the child with her; Mère Fourcy was kindhearted, and Denise showed her that as he grew up Coco would be of use to them, and that the money left by the gentleman from Paris would be more than sufficient to educate him. Père Calieux, who realized that his son could not make his soup, consented to leave him with Denise for the present, and the girl was overjoyed.

Behold, then, Coco a member of the little milkmaid's family, and leading a pleasant life. Denise, who knew how to read,—not a rare accomplishment in our villages nowadays,—determined to educate her little protégé, and did not fail to speak to him every day of the handsome gentleman who had paid so generously for his bowl.

But another month passed, and the gentleman from Paris did not come again. Denise, who still loved to muse beneath the great oak, often said to herself:

"It was quite right to think that he didn't mean a word of all those fine things he said to me. But, when he wasn't coming back, it wasn't worth while for that Monsieur Bertrand to say: 'Look out for yourself!'"

VIII

A BACHELOR'S MORNING RECEPTION

"Is Auguste in, Monsieur Bertrand?" inquired a young woman of twenty-four, slender and graceful, with fine brown eyes, very black hair, pale complexion, white, even teeth, and a somewhat fatigued expression; a face, be it said, which was enlivened and made most attractive by a mischievous smile. This young woman was a certain Virginie, of whom mention was made in the cabriolet on the way to Monsieur Destival's; she had just rung the bell at the door of Auguste's apartment, although it was only eight o'clock in the morning.

"Monsieur Dalville has gone out," replied Bertrand, with a very slight nod to Mademoiselle Virginie, which did not deter her from entering the apartment.

"That's impossible, Bertrand; you say that because there's somebody here, I suppose, and those are your orders. We know all about that. But I must see him; I have something very important to say to him. Really, my little Bertrand, I'm not joking."

"I give you my word, mademoiselle, that Monsieur Dalville has gone out; or, rather, that he hasn't come in. He went to a grand ball last night, and it seems to have lasted a long while."

"Great heaven! what actions! Why, it's shocking. That young man is destroying himself. Bertrand, you don't keep a sharp enough lookout over him; it isn't right. You ought to preach at him."

"In the first place, mademoiselle, Monsieur Dalville's the master; in the second place, when I try to talk reason with him, he refuses to listen to me, or sends me to the devil."

"That's very wrong! Ah! if I were only his mother or sister, you'd see how good I'd make him! I'm going to wait for him, Bertrand, for he must come in soon. Still at a ball at eight in the morning! Oh! I don't take any stock in that yarn."

Mademoiselle Virginie, who was perfectly familiar with the apartment, opened a door leading to a small salon in which she installed herself, placing her hat on one chair, her shawl on another, and throwing herself on a couch. Bertrand quietly followed her, and as if accustomed to such performances from her, continued to eat the bread and cheese which he had in his hand when she rang the bell.

"I certainly do not care for Monsieur Auguste any more," said Virginie, after a moment; "I must be a confounded fool to care for a man who has thirty-six mistresses; hasn't he, Bertrand?"

"Oh! mademoiselle, I can't say——"

"Yes, yes, he has thirty-six! I don't say all at once; he would have to be a northern Hercules. And yet—if it could be—It isn't worth while; one man's no better than another. I know them so well! Don't you think I'm right, Bertrand?"

"Oh! as for that, there have been men who—the great Turenne, for instance."

"Bah! what an ass the man is with his great Turenne! Does he take me for a sentry-box? I don't know ancient history, Bertrand; I don't care about anything except my own time, and I tell you Auguste's a rake. In the first place, he played me a shameful trick three weeks ago.

Think of it! he made an appointment with me, and we were to pass the day together and go to Feydeau in the evening; and monsieur left me to cool my heels and went off into the country, to his Monsieur Destival, business agent. He's another fox, that fellow! He'd better attend to what goes on in his own house, eh, Bertrand?"

"In his own house, mademoiselle? Do you mean——"

"Yes, you understand well enough! That is, unless he likes it. Bless my soul! there are husbands whom that sort of thing just suits! Did you spend the night at that place?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Mon Dieu! how rural! Did you stay there several days? Come, Bertrand, speak out—you have time enough to eat; you know that I haven't set foot inside this door for an age, and Monsieur Auguste hasn't so much as had the decency to come to inquire for my health. And yet I've been very ill; I nearly died! I am ever so much changed, am I not, Bertrand?"

"Why, no, mademoiselle, I don't see that——"

"Oh, yes! the whites of my eyes are yellow yet. To be sure this dress isn't becoming. It's too high, it cramps me.—Well, Bertrand, what did you do in the country?"

"I taught Monsieur Destival the manual, mademoiselle."

"Oho! is he going to enlist in the voltigeurs? How about his wife—does she do the manual too? She ought to learn to drum so that she can march in front of her husband when he goes out to fire his gun."

"I don't know what madame was doing, mademoiselle."

"Of course not; it was your business to keep the husband busy, while Monsieur Auguste dallied with

madame in the thick shrubbery! I can see that man firing at crows while his wife hunts strawberries! Ha! ha!”

Mademoiselle Virginie laughed so heartily that it was several minutes before she could speak again. Meanwhile Bertrand paced the salon floor, continuing his breakfast.

“Oh dear! it hurts to laugh like that.—Tell me, Bertrand, when did you come back?”

“The next day, mademoiselle.”

“And Auguste hasn’t been there again since?”

“No, mademoiselle; he’s often wanted to go, but he hasn’t had time.”

“Oh! of course not; he has so much to do! And he hasn’t been to see me once in the last fortnight! He leaves me sick, almost dying! And I am not well yet. Oh, no! I am still suffering terribly.—What’s that you’re eating, Bertrand?”

“Just plain Roquefort cheese, mademoiselle.”

“It’s queer to watch another person eat; it makes me want to eat too; you see, I always have to do what I see others do. You may as well give me some breakfast, my little Bertrand, because, you see, if I should whine and cry till to-morrow, it’s all nonsense, and my calf wouldn’t be any bigger for that; would it, Bertrand?”

“Mademoiselle, if you——”

“He’s a good fellow, this Bertrand; I love him a lot, I do; yes, I’m very fond of him, although he’s a bit of a traitor, like his master.”

“Oh! as for that, mademoiselle, when you talk about being honest, I flatter myself——”

“All right, Bertrand; I only said that for fun. But I’m not going to breakfast on honesty. What are you going to give me?”

"If mademoiselle would like coffee, I'll go down and have some sent up."

"Coffee! oh! that makes a hole in my stomach, it's no good. Haven't you got anything to eat here?"

"We have the remains of a pie, a bit of fowl, and some Lyon sausage."

"Ah! I like those better than coffee; bring 'em all, my little Bertrand; just to pass the time till Auguste comes back."

Bertrand moved a small tea-table to the couch, and lost no time in laying it for Mademoiselle Virginie's breakfast, who assisted him by going to the sideboard herself for whatever she needed, saying:

"I am sorry to put you to so much trouble, Bertrand."

"You are joking, mademoiselle."

"Where's little Tony?"

"He's with monsieur; he has to have somebody on account of the cabriolet."

"That boy's a sly little rascal; he'll never tell me anything, whereas you, Bertrand, you do at least talk; to be sure, I know that you don't tell me everything. After all, you're right; there are some things I ought not to know, they'd make me too unhappy. Meanwhile, I'll have my breakfast."

Mademoiselle Virginie took her place before the breakfast, and, while repeating from time to time that she was still sick, speedily caused the cold fowl to disappear, and made a vigorous assault on the pie and the sausage, washing them down with claret, in which she did not deem it necessary to put water.

But, while she was eating, Virginie glanced at a clock in front of her and cried:

"The rascal! Why doesn't he come home? You must admit, Bertrand, that people don't stay at a ball till nine

o'clock in the morning. I know myself that bourgeois balls always end by five; my aunt used to give one sometimes. Poor aunt! I shall have to make up with her now!—I say, this pie isn't half bad.—You see, Bertrand, my aunt's a woman of your sort."

"I understand—a tall woman, five feet six inches, like me, eh?"

"No, no! what a donkey you are with your six inches! Still, it would be rather nice* if my aunt had six of 'em. When I say of your sort, I mean a fine woman, a respectable woman. Oh! she preaches to me, I tell you, she does! She used to say such touching things to me that I wept like a Magdalen while I was listening; but once outside—prrr!—I forgot all about it.—A body could eat a two pound loaf with this devilish sausage!—That wretched Auguste! Ah! he shall pay me for this. In the first place, I don't propose to go till he comes back, if I have to stay here till to-morrow. It don't make any difference to me, I'm my own mistress."

At that moment the bell rang softly.

"Ah! there he is!" cried Virginie; "don't tell him I'm here, Bertrand, do you hear? I want to surprise him. Shut the door of the salon."

"Very well, mademoiselle; but I have an idea that it isn't monsieur; I didn't recognize his ring."

Having closed the door of the salon, Bertrand opened the one leading to the hall; whereupon, instead of Auguste, he saw the pretty neighbor of the third floor to whom he had restored the poodle.

The pretty neighbor was a blonde, with blue eyes and a pink complexion; her voice was low and sweet, her manners and her bearing savored of affectation; but she

* The joke consists in the fact that the same word—*pouce*—means "inch" and "thumb."

was pretty, and her natural charms won forgiveness for those which she tried to impart to herself.

"Isn't my little Lozor in your rooms, Monsieur Bertrand?" asked the young blonde in an undertone, with a furtive glance about the apartment.

"I have not had the honor to see him, madame," replied Bertrand, still holding the door only partly open; which fact did not prevent the neighbor from stepping farther into the room.

"That is strange; he went out this morning; my maid is at market, and I hoped to find him here."

"If the deserter appears, madame, I shall have the pleasure of bringing him back to you at once."

"Poor Lozor! I am really anxious about him."

And the neighbor, advancing step by step, found herself in the centre of the reception room, while Bertrand still held the door ajar, hoping thus to induce her to go away.

"Monsieur Dalville went out last night in full dress, didn't he, Monsieur Bertrand?"

"Yes, madame."

"I happened to be at my window and I saw him. I would have liked to say a word to him, to ask him for a book that he promised to let me have to-day. But he went away so fast! If it wasn't so early, I would ask him to be kind enough to give it to me now. But that would disturb him perhaps?"

The neighbor seemed to await a reply, but Bertrand kept silent and contented himself with swinging the door back and forth.

"Is Monsieur Dalville still in bed?" inquired the pretty blonde at last, bestowing upon the ex-corporal a glance as tender as her voice was sweet. He was about to reply when the door of the small salon was abruptly

thrown open, and disclosed Virginie, who came forward with an air of deliberation, saying:

"Well! is it coming off to-day, Bertrand? Are we playing hide-and-seek?"

When Virginie appeared, Bertrand closed the hall door and sat down, muttering between his teeth:

"Fight it out; it's none of my business."

At sight of Mademoiselle Virginie, the neighbor turned a little pinker than she was, and her eyes lost their usual soft expression. Virginie, for her part, scrutinized the neighbor from top to toe, contracting her dark eyebrows, and allowing a scornful smile to play about her lips. Bertrand alone seemed unmoved; and while the two ladies eyed each other from head to foot, he calmly swallowed a glass of wine, to wash down his Roquefort.

"You didn't tell me, Monsieur Bertrand, that Monsieur Dalville had company," said the neighbor at last, in a voice which she strove to make as soft as usual, but in which one could detect a note of something resembling anger. "If I had known, I certainly would not have ventured to disturb him."

"Does madame want to see Auguste, Bertrand?" inquired Virginie carelessly, smiling with a sly expression.

The familiar manner in which the pretty brunette referred to her neighbor seemed to confound Madame Saint-Edmond, who did what she could to conceal her agitation, saying:

"Yes, madame, I wish to see Monsieur Dalville."

"If it is anything that someone else can say to Auguste, I will undertake to do so, madame."

"You are too kind, madame, but I wish to speak to Monsieur Dalville in person."

"Ah! I understand. Auguste is already acquainted with madame, I presume?"

"Yes, madame, I have the honor of Monsieur Dalville's acquaintance."

"As Auguste tells me all his business, I might be able to answer madame, if she cared to explain the purpose of her call."

"Am I to understand that madame is now commissioned to receive the persons who may call on Monsieur Dalville?"

"That may be, madame."

"Monsieur Bertrand, you ought to have told me—to have spared me—But I absolutely insist on speaking to Monsieur Dalville. Let him know that I have just a word to say to him. Then I will leave him at peace with madame."

"If I had had a chance to answer sooner, madame, I'd have told you before this that my lieutenant hasn't come home from the ball yet; that's why madame was waiting in the small salon."

"Very well! I am going to wait for him too," said the neighbor, whose voice was no longer of the most honeyed kind; and as she passed Bertrand on her way to the salon, she whispered to him:

"I don't know who this woman is, but she's very bad style!"

Virginie stayed behind in the reception room a moment, to say to Bertrand:

"Who's that little jackdaw? Don't lie to me, my little Bertrand, or I'll make a row."

"She's a lady who lives in the house."

"Aha! lives in the house, does she? That's very convenient! She looks like a regular slut! Has Auguste known her long?"

"Why, no; about six weeks."

"Does he love her?"

"How do you expect me to know that? Do you suppose I ask my lieutenant: 'Do you love So-and-So, or Such-a-One?'"

"All right! you're a villain. I can only say that Auguste shows poor taste! She's a homely creature, that woman; she has red rims about her eyes, just like a rabbit's, and she has an ugly mouth, hasn't she, Bertrand?"

"Why, I don't think so."

"As if you knew anything about it! I tell you that she's a horror, with her princess's airs! Ah! if she expects to impose on me, she's very much mistaken. The sinner, to insist on speaking to Auguste in private! Just to tease her, I'm going to eat some more pie, even if I die of indigestion."

Virginie returned to the salon, resumed her seat on the couch and attacked the breakfast once more. The neighbor seated herself on a chair at the other end of the room, and while making a pretence of looking out into the street, watched Virginie's every movement from the corner of her eye. Bertrand meanwhile remained in the outer room, leaving the ladies to adjust matters as they chose. As she ate, Virginie hummed snatches of comic opera airs; Madame Saint-Edmond did not make a sound. This situation lasted for some time. At last Virginie, beginning to lose patience, called Bertrand and said to him:

"Your pie isn't at all nice; the last time I breakfasted with Auguste, we had a much better one."

Bertrand simply removed the scanty remains of the pie, saying to himself:

"I'd have sworn that she found it good!"

"Bertrand," said Virginie, after a moment, "will you give me a little water and some sugar, please? It will do me a lot of good."

"She must need it," said the neighbor to herself, with a sarcastic smile.

"By the way, my little Bertrand, you have some orange flower water, haven't you? It will allay nervous excitement."

Virginie laughed when she said this, and was evidently making fun of Madame Saint-Edmond; but that lady seemed to pay no heed to what she said.

"Upon my word, I am very sorry that I disturbed you, Bertrand," resumed Virginie, preparing some sweetened water for herself; "I might just as well have gone to get it myself, for I know where everything is. I am perfectly at home here. But you are so good-natured!"

"I do my duty, mademoiselle," said Bertrand, with a military salute.

"I know, Monsieur Bertrand, how attached you are to Auguste," said Virginie, assuming a sentimental tone. "And so, whenever I mention you to him, I am very glad to speak in terms of praise. That's no more than justice, that's sure. Auguste, who has every confidence in me, will follow my advice, I trust, and you'll find, Monsieur Bertrand, that I am not capable—of—of never doing——"

Virginie always became entangled when she tried to talk sense or to be sentimental. Bertrand confounded himself in reverences, awaiting the end of a speech which he did not comprehend; but luckily for Virginie, the bell rang.

"There's Auguste!" she cried, while Bertrand went to the door.

Thereupon there was a great commotion in the salon. Virginie rose, all ready to rush to the door, glaring at the blonde lady with an expression of defiance. The latter, too, had risen; but she did not look at Virginie,

and did her utmost to maintain a calm and indifferent attitude.

But their hopes were blasted once more. It was not Dalville who had rung, but Tony, his diminutive groom, who came to inform Bertrand that after the ball, which was at Madame de la Thomassinière's, the resplendent Athalie had carried away a part of the company to breakfast at her country estate. Auguste was among the number; his hostess had refused to allow him even a moment to return home and change his clothes. But, as Auguste had emptied his purse at cards during the evening, he sent his little jockey, with the cabriolet, to obtain some money, which he was to deliver to his master at Madame de la Thomassinière's estate.

As Virginie had held the salon door ajar, both ladies heard what the little groom said to Bertrand.

"You see, mesdames, it is useless for you to wait any longer," said Bertrand, returning to the salon; "mon-sieur's off to the country; he has sent for something and that means that he isn't likely to return very soon."

"Yes, he has sent for money," said Virginie, with a sigh. "God! how the man does throw it away! It's frightful! If he only gave me a quarter of what he——"

Virginie checked herself; she realized that she had made a mistake. Madame Saint-Edmond cast a contemptuous glance at her and left the room, saying to Bertrand:

"All that I ask you, monsieur, is to be kind enough to let me know when Monsieur Dalville returns."

"I shall not fail, madame," replied the corporal, escorting the neighbor to the door. In the reception room she said to him:

"I don't know who this hussy is that I found installed in Monsieur Dalville's apartment; but she acts like a

fishwoman, and her manner is so insolent that I wouldn't have her for my cook."

When the neighbor had gone, Virginie concluded to resume her hat and shawl.

"Well," she muttered, "I may as well go, as that good-for-nothing isn't coming home. It's a nuisance, though, for I really needed to see him. I wanted to ask him—That idiot of a landlord is always in my rooms! Oh! how he tires me! He's furious because he tried to make love to me and I wouldn't listen to him. Think of it—a little seducer of fifty-five! What do you suppose he did, Bertrand, in the hot weather? He came to see me in the morning in his dressing gown; but one day, when the wind blew, I saw that my gentleman was dressed underneath like—like a Scotchman!—'Come, come,' said I to myself, 'this is too free and easy! If he comes here that way for the purpose of seducing me, just a minute!'—He wouldn't go away, so I called the concierge and had the landlord put out of my room. Since then, he's as ugly as sin. Well, I'll come back very soon.—Ah! I know where I'll go. Yes, that fat Englishman, who was willing to set me up in business, on condition that—Good! I'll go and tell him that I've found a linen-draper's shop. After all, I am tired of living this way; I mean to have a shop. I wouldn't look so bad behind a counter, would I, Bertrand?—I say, the neighbor was pretty well stirred up, wasn't she? She went before I did; in fact, she'd have had to carry me to make me go first, because when I take a thing into my head, I don't—Adieu, my little Bertrand."

Mademoiselle Virginie slipped through the door and downstairs, humming.

"Gad!" said Bertrand to himself as he looked after her, "if my lieutenant had come home, I don't quite

know how things would have turned out. This one's a regular demon, and the other, with her die-away voice, was beginning to make eyes like pistol shots, too! Never mind, I got out of it pretty well; at all events nobody fainted this time, and that's what I am always afraid of. Thunder and guns! I'd rather have ten raw recruits to lick into shape than one fainting woman to bring to. In fact, there are some of 'em that are quite obstinate about it."

"Whenever you're ready, Monsieur Bertrand," said little Tony, following the ex-corporal into the salon.

"Ah! to be sure, my boy; I forgot all about it. He must have money, always money! Well, come with me, and we'll go to the strong-box. Sacrebleu! it makes me feel bad to keep taking out and never putting back. When I tell monsieur so, he says: 'Go to my notary.'—That's all right; I know that the notary always gives me money; but by giving and giving—However, the lieutenant's the master, and I must obey.—How much does he want, Tony?"

"Fifty louis, Monsieur Bertrand."

"Fifty louis! he had that much in his purse yesterday when he started for that ball! What in the devil do they do at these swell parties, to get rid of so much money in one evening? It seems that he's no luckier at these Thomassinets—Thomassinières'—than he is anywhere else!"

"Oh! it was very fine, Monsieur Bertrand!"

"Ah! so you saw it, did you?"

"Yes, I went up to the servants' quarters. They gave me ices and punch and cakes."

"Oho! I can understand that you liked that! But do you know that with the twelve hundred francs that monsieur lost at cards, we could have had some famous cakes

here?—Here, my boy, here's the yellow boys; look out not to lose them."

"Oh! don't be afraid, Monsieur Bertrand, the cabriolet's waiting for me at the door."

"And don't drive Bébelle too fast, d'ye hear?"

The little groom had already gone. Bertrand was still standing in front of the strong-box, which was open. He counted the remaining contents, and frowned; he seemed terrified by the rapidity with which Dalville was spending his money. He closed the desk at last, with a shake of the head, saying: "It's his; he has the right to dispose of it." And to dispel his melancholy thoughts, Bertrand went down to the cellar and brought up a bottle of old burgundy, because, being entrusted with the duty of watching the wine, he wished to be sure that it did not run away.

IX

MADemoiselle TAPOTTE AND THE MARQUIS

We have heard little Tony say that his master was at Madame de la Thomassinière's ball; whence we must conclude that, since the day at Madame Destival's country house, Dalville and the wealthy speculator had become more intimate. Auguste, being invited by the gushing Athalie, had not failed to accept her invitations, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière, seeing that Dalville joined in all the pleasure parties without calculating the expense, that he played for high stakes, and lost with the best grace imaginable, agreed with madame that the young man was of the sort to go all lengths.

Madame Destival was secretly furious to see Dalville amid the throng of Madame de la Thomassinière's adorers; but that did not prevent her from continuing to call that lady "my love" and "my dear," because she would have been sorry not to be invited to the gorgeous parties given by the capitalist; and although she went to his house solely to seek subjects for criticism, and although Monsieur Destival could not eat his dinner for wrath at seeing a table much better served than his own, they were very glad to subject themselves to these vexations.

Is it surprising that Dalville, in that whirlpool of dissipation, and constantly in the company of charming women who chose him for their escort—is it surprising that he should have forgotten the milkmaid of Montfermeil? However, the memory of Denise was not altogether effaced from his mind, and on several occasions he had formed the plan of going to the village to see the child and the young woman; but when he was on the point of carrying out his plan, some new invitation, some festivity that he could not miss, detained him in Paris, where the time passes so quickly for happy people.

It was to her country estate, at Fleury, that the charming Athalie conveyed Auguste and three other gentlemen who had been at her ball. Madame had devised the party while dancing a quadrille, and had determined that they would eat fresh eggs on the grass, while walking through the "ladies' chain." Auguste and the other three young men were invited and they instantly accepted. Madame de la Thomassinière, who displayed no less activity in her amusements than variety in her costumes, issued her orders at once. Her husband alone knew nothing of the excursion; and at eight o'clock in the morning, when the four gentlemen were finally induced to leave the écarté table, madame gave them seats

in her calèche, laughing like a madwoman at the idea of abducting thus four cavaliers in full dress. Monsieur de la Thomassinière was in bed, but his valet was instructed to inform him when he woke where he could find madame, in case he should desire to join her.

A word or two that Madame Destival had heard during the night had apprised her of the delightful project for the morning; and as she and her husband were not of the party, they returned home in very ill humor.

"Always some new form of dissipation!" said Madame Destival, with a bitter smile. "That Madame de la Thomassinière is at her wits' end to invent something that will ruin her husband."

"If she only would ruin him!" exclaimed Destival; "but no; that man has the greatest luck! Everything succeeds with him. However, he doesn't shine by his wit, that's sure enough! But he has just made sixty thousand francs in a transaction that I had in view."

"Well, monsieur, why didn't you carry it out?"

"I hadn't funds enough to buy the debt, madame."

"You should borrow, find the money. Really, monsieur, you ought to blush for shame when you see the show of magnificence that that Thomassinière makes, and you do not outshine him. Those people have eight servants, and I have just one wretched maid and an ill-tempered footman who does everything!—I want a lady's maid, monsieur; I insist upon having one!"

"Before long, madame, I hope——"

"They have a calèche and a landau and a coupé, and we have only a very shabby cabriolet! But monsieur must needs learn to drill, instead of giving his attention to making money!"

"I have several affairs under way, madame. If I sell Monin that house——"

"Well, come to some conclusion about it, monsieur. I tell you that I can't live like this any longer; I must have two new cashmeres, a lady's maid, a calèche, and a country house where I can give parties; not like that old barrack at Livry, which I can't endure now."

"Never fear, madame. I must have a clerk, a man cook, and a negro servant. I am going to venture into some new schemes, and you will see that we will soon crush that miserable parvenu, who murders the language with an assurance that suffocates me."

The calèche, drawn by two spirited horses, bore away Athalie and the four young men of fashion, among whom was Dalville. Each of the four paid court to the petite-maitresse, who had the art of distributing a word, a smile, a glance, to each in turn, and revelled deliciously in the homage that was laid at her feet. Is there a greater joy for a true coquette than to be surrounded by men who wear her chains? Athalie was vivacious and playful; they knew that, to please her, they must be overflowing with hilarity, and the four gentlemen vied with one another in doing and saying the most extravagant things. Among all the *bons mots* that were made, there were some very bad ones; for the more one tries to be witty, the less success one has. But Athalie, grateful for the efforts they made to entertain her, greeted them all with bursts of laughter; and the gentlemen zealously followed suit, although they would have been sorely puzzled sometimes to say what they were laughing about. In the midst of this running fire of nonsense, the light vehicle arrived at the country house.

Madame de la Thomassinière's property at Fleury was a charming abode, which, in truth, left the little country house at Livry a long way behind. There, everything witnessed to luxury and elegance: spacious courtyards,

cardrooms, ballrooms and banquet-halls; peristyles of a severely simple style of architecture led to daintily furnished apartments; nothing had been forgotten that could increase the comfort and pleasure of the occupants of that charming abode. In the gardens, which were of vast extent, you found summer-houses for reading, for work, or for repose; cool grottoes, shady walks, dense shrubbery, labyrinths where one could lose oneself, delicious nooks where the rippling murmur of a brook invited one to dream or to do something else; and over that enchanting spot a lovely woman of twenty years reigned supreme and gave no thought to anything save the invention of new forms of amusement.

While the mistress of the house gave orders for an out-of-door breakfast, the gentlemen strolled about the gardens and admired their manifold beauties. Auguste walked alone toward a hedge between the garden and the orchard. It was a part of the garden where no one ever walked. Why, then, did Auguste turn his steps in that direction? Because he had caught sight of a short skirt and a little cap beyond the hedge, and an irresistible fascination drew the young man toward whatever suggested anything feminine.

Auguste entered the orchard, therefore, and saw a young woman picking apricots. She had neither the refined features nor the charm of Denise. She was simply a rosy-cheeked, fresh, buxom damsel; but there are men who prefer that to waterfalls, grottoes and labyrinths constructed at vast expense; Auguste was one of them. Who would believe that a simple petticoat may be awarded the preference over the marvelous creations of art; that it may disturb the peace of an empire, overturn a republic, crush a whole people, astound the universe, ordain laws, and cause half of mankind to lose their

senses? O Cleopatra, Elizabeth, Delilah, Judith, Ninon! your petticoats wrought all these miracles! To be sure, it was not your petticoats exactly to which your thanks were due.

The stout girl was standing on a ladder that rested against the tree, and was plucking the ripest fruit. Auguste walked to the ladder and looked up; I presume that he was looking at the apricots.

"I say! what are you doing there, monsieur?" said the girl, when, upon turning her head, she discovered the young man.

"My dear girl, I am admiring. I am a great lover of the beauties of nature, and I am as well able to appreciate them in sackcloth as in silk."

The stout girl, who did not understand this language, concluded that the gentleman was fond of apricots, and offered him one, saying:

"Here, monsieur, here's one that's good and ripe."

Auguste took the apricot and walked still nearer the ladder.

"I'm afraid that you'll fall," he said to the gardener; "I'll hold the ladder."

"Oh! it ain't worth while, monsieur, thanks; I know how to do it; anyway I can cling to the branches."

However, Auguste remained at the foot of the ladder, and as the girl was on the fourth rung, the young man's hand naturally found itself in close proximity to her leg, and, naturally again, that hand caressed a woolen stocking encasing a calf with which a dancer at the Opéra would have been content.

The gardener continued to gather fruit while Auguste patted her calf.

"On my word!" he thought, "here's a peasant who knows what's what, who is learned in the ways of the

world. She is not precisely one of Florian's shepherdesses. This leg reminds me rather of Teniers's Flemish women; but at all events, it doesn't scratch, and that's very lucky, for with such calves as these, the scar would be lasting."

"When I heard someone coming behind me," said the girl, "I thought at first 'twas monsieur."

"Monsieur! what monsieur?" inquired Auguste.

"Pardi! monsieur le bourgeois, my master."

"Ah! Monsieur de la Thomassinière?"

"Why, yes."

"So he comes into his orchard sometimes, does he?"

"Oh, yes! he comes here."

"Does he like apricots?"

"Oh, yes! apricots, and something else."

"Does he take hold of your leg too, my child?"

"Does he! pardi! rather! Catch him holding back!"

The stout girl chuckled, and Auguste said to himself:

"It seems that Monsieur de la Thomassinière, who talks of nothing but the duchesses, countesses and baronesses he courts, dances attendance on and deigns to be tender with his gardener. How many men try to take credit in society for brilliant conquests, when they have triumphed over nobody but their cook! However, there are many baronesses whose calves aren't as firm as these."

While he indulged in these reflections, the young man continued to pat the leg, and the stout girl to laugh. Her basket being full, she began to descend the ladder, and, as Auguste did not lower his hand, that member necessarily found itself above the calf, where there was still much to pat, and the stout girl laughed louder than ever.

"Does Monsieur de la Thomassinière permit himself to embrace you also?" Auguste asked, looking the gardener in the face.

"Well, I say! well, pardié! Well, well, but you make me laugh!"

At that moment Auguste saw Athalie's pretty cap over the hedge, as that lady approached the orchard. He ceased instantly to make the stout girl laugh, and asked her hastily:

"Your name?"

"Tapotte."

"And your room?"

"Over there, at the end, by the shed where they keep the hay."

"Good; adieu—I'll see you again."

With that the young man walked quickly to the entrance to the orchard and passed through at the very moment that Athalie reached the hedge.

"Where have you been hiding, monsieur?" she asked, with a smile.

"Why, madame—I went in here, you see, not knowing that it was the orchard, and, to tell you the truth, I have been eating your fruit."

"Before breakfast? that is very wrong. I am a wee bit selfish; I don't like anybody to take any pleasure without me. I supposed that you had found some milkmaid here on my place, some peasant girl, whose—ruddy complexion had taken your fancy."

"Oh, madame!"

"I do not think, however, that this establishment contains any rustic beauties worthy of your homage; for I assume that you still have some taste, and I agree that the little milkmaid was not bad-looking."

"True, true, she was very pretty; and you remind me——"

"Nonsense, monsieur; give me your arm and come to breakfast; everything is ready on a plot of greensward

shaded by honeysuckle. The other gentlemen are waiting for us, and it is an unheard-of thing that I should have to come in search of you."

"If you would allow me to find you sometimes, madame, you would not have that trouble."

"Oh! no sentiment, monsieur, I beg; remember that we came here only to be foolish."

They reached the shady nook where a dainty repast was spread. A *petite-maitresse* puts coquetry into everything, and the open-air breakfast, although it consisted simply of milk, eggs, butter, fruit and excellent wine, seemed far richer when served by a lovely woman, in china decorated with lovely landscapes. Daintiness never spoils anything; it often enhances the value of the simplest things, and a certain wine which has a most delectable flavor in an artistically cut glass, might seem poor stuff in a beer mug.

They had been at table a quarter of an hour, talking, laughing, and eating heartily, because dancing, enjoyment and the fresh air sharpen the appetite, when they heard Monsieur de la Thomassinière's voice in a path near by.

"There's my husband," said Athalie; "I was sure that he'd come; he's very fond of this place. But he has brought somebody with him."

"Let us pray that it isn't some horrible bore," said one of the young men.

"Oh! what does it matter? If it's anyone who bores me, I shall pay no attention to him, and you must do as I do, messieurs."

Monsieur de la Thomassinière appeared with a man of mature years, but dressed in the latest fashion, whose gait and manners, and even his voice, were affected. He had a distinguished face, but his look was a little deceitful; he smiled almost constantly, and frequently raised to

his eyes an eye-glass, through which he admired the flowers, trees and shrubs.

"Here they are!" said Monsieur de la Thomassinière, when he caught sight of the little party. "My valet did not deceive me, and my concierge's information was accurate. This way, monsieur le marquis, this way."

"What's this? my husband has brought a marquis to see me!" exclaimed Athalie; "come, messieurs, we must make a little room for him. Really, Monsieur de la Thomassinière is as rattle-brained as I am! The idea of not letting me know!"

"This is exquisite, enchanting! It is all in the most perfect taste!" exclaimed the marquis, going into ecstasies over everything he saw. When he caught sight of the little party of five, he made a very low bow to the mistress of the house, who had risen to receive him; while Monsieur de la Thomassinière, who felt two feet taller since he had brought home a marquis, bestowed a patronizing nod on the young men, and said to his wife, taking his companion's hand:

"Madame, this is Monsieur le Marquis de Cligneval, who has been kind enough to condescend to allow me to bring him to call upon you. He came to see me at my house this morning about a *consequential* matter. I said to him: 'We can talk about this just as well at my place in the country.' That suited him, and gad! I had my dapple-grey horse put in the cabriolet, monsieur le marquis got in with me, I gave the beast a cut with my whip, and zeste! we were off like the wind.—My dapple-grey goes prettily, eh, monsieur le marquis?"

"Like an angel, my dear fellow.—Pray excuse me, madame, for appearing in morning dress."

"One is always suitably attired in the country, monsieur; and these gentlemen, you will observe, are dressed

just as I brought them away from a ball, without giving them time to change their clothes. But you will breakfast with us, I trust?"

"With pleasure, madame."

"Oh, yes!" said La Thomassinière, shaking Monsieur de Cligneval's hand; "oh, yes! the marquis will have some breakfast; he promised. I'll have some, too."

"Take your seats then, messieurs, and be content with what I have to give you."

Madame gave the marquis a seat by her side; Monsieur de la Thomassinière would have liked to sit on the marquis's other side, but he was obliged to be content with a seat opposite him. Monsieur de Cligneval did full justice to the breakfast; he declared everything excellent, delicious, exquisite, although La Thomassinière exhausted his breath saying to him:

"Oh! I usually have much better things to eat. But we didn't know, madame was not notified. I hope to treat you much better another time. This is an unpretentious repast; but when I choose, I do things very nicely."

While praising the food, Monsieur de Cligneval found time to bestow compliments on the hostess. The marquis was well bred; he carried a little too far perhaps the determination to make his good breeding apparent; but he was agreeable and witty, and the whole party was soon in high spirits, even Monsieur de la Thomassinière, who never laughed because he thought it bad form, but who laughed very loud now in order to copy monsieur le marquis.

When she passed the fruit, Athalie found several that were not ripe.

"These apricots are good for nothing," she said to a servant.

"We must have some better ones than these," cried La Thomassinière. "Tell the gardener to bring some at once—the best she can find."

The servant obeyed, and Mademoiselle Tapotte soon arrived with a basket filled with superb fruit, which she handed to Athalie, keeping her eyes on the ground as if she dared not look at the guests; whereas, on the contrary, the young men scrutinized the buxom creature, making comments in undertones, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière cast furtive glances at her.

"That is right!" said Athalie, as she took the basket, "these are fine. See, messieurs, they have just been picked; they look much better.—Another time, Tapotte, don't send me green fruit."

"No, madame," said the gardener, with a very awkward curtsy; then she took her leave, much redder than when she came.

"What did you call that stout damsel, madame?" inquired one of the young men.

"Tapotte, monsieur."

"Indeed! that's a queer name."

"It's amusing," said the marquis.

"Yes, very amusing," rejoined La Thomassinière. And Auguste reflected that the name was well deserved.

"She's not a bad-looking girl," said one of the young men.

"Oh! what can you see that's attractive in that creature?" cried Athalie; "she's heavy and awkward and vulgar."

"Mon Dieu! she's a huge mass of flesh that moves, and that's all," said the marquis.

"Yes, yes," assented La Thomassinière, blushing slightly, "she moves, she moves, and, as monsieur le marquis says, she knows how to do nothing else."

"What are you laughing at, Monsieur Dalville?" Athalie asked Auguste; "at Mademoiselle Tapotte? You have said nothing about her."

"I'll bet that monsieur agrees with me," said the marquis, "and that he sees nothing about her that deserves to be looked at a second time."

"He!" rejoined Athalie; "oh! you don't know him, monsieur; he detects charms under round caps and calico dresses."

"I don't deny it, madame, and I do not think that it is necessary to wear fine clothes in order to be beautiful. As for your gardener, certainly she has neither pretty features nor a pretty figure; but, for all that, her freshness and bloom, her good-natured appearance——"

"Fie, fie, monsieur! fie! hold your tongue! for you are quite capable of perverting these gentlemen. But we have devoted quite enough time to Mademoiselle Tapotte; I hope that monsieur le marquis will do me the honor to come and look at my garden; and if he could be induced to give us this day——"

"Madame, I am too pleasantly situated here to summon courage to refuse, and although I am expected to dine with a Bavarian prince, I cannot resist your charms."

"I count upon you also, messieurs," said Athalie, addressing her other guests; "you must pass the whole day here. Oh! no refusals! you must do it, or you and I will have a falling-out. I have rooms to give you to-night, and to-morrow morning I will drive you back to Paris in my calèche."

"Yes," said La Thomassinière, "as the marquis is to stay, you other gentlemen must stay too. There will be more of us, and it will be more amusing. I have some matters to attend to; but, faith, when one has the honor

of having a marquis under one's roof, the devil may take the rest."

The young gentlemen attempted to raise some objections on account of their clothes; but the fascinating Athalie once more announced: "I insist upon it!" at the same time bestowing upon them one of the smiles which it is so hard to resist; and that levelled all obstacles. Auguste made no objection at all, being by no means ill pleased to pass a night at Fleury, and smiling already at certain thoughts that passed through his mind.

They left the table. La Thomassinière seemed determined not to leave the marquis's side for an instant; but that nobleman offered his arm to Athalie for a stroll about the garden, and La Thomassinière, as he could not take the marquis's other arm, walked on the other side, keeping close at his elbow, and talking constantly to him, although most of the time the marquis made no reply because he preferred to talk with madame. Auguste took a seat in a grotto made of shells, not daring to return to the orchard during the day. The other young men had taken possession of the billiard room.

But Athalie, having arrangements to make for the entertainment of her guests, and being determined that the dinner should make them amends for the frugality of the breakfast, soon left Monsieur de Cligneval with her husband. La Thomassinière instantly seized the marquis's arm and walked on with him, saying:

"Now, let us talk business, monsieur le marquis, for that is my strong point,—business,—especially large affairs, speculations, and—What do you think of my labyrinth?"

"Charming!"

"And my pond?"

"Superb!"

"The waterfall is mine, I invented it. Formerly the water used to fall straight down. That was too commonplace! I had rocks arranged zigzag—that's very much prettier."

"Yes, it does you credit."

"You are very kind. Now I am going to take you into my woods, thence into my fields, where I have some thoroughbred merino sheep. Another invention of mine. Then we will go into my desert; you shall see my deer—ah! they are superb creatures, my deer! almost like stags."

"Have you no stags?"

"No; I wanted one, but Madame de la Thomassinière declared that it was unnecessary, that we had enough tame beasts. I will take you to my summer-house too; we have enough fine things to see to take up two or three hours."

The marquis, who was beginning to be weary of the tête-à-tête, announced that he was fatigued, and as they were then near the grotto where Auguste was seated, they took seats beside him, La Thomassinière having said that he was tired as soon as Monsieur de Cligneval spoke of resting.

"I have an estate of this sort," said the marquis, reclining on a mossy bank, "in Bourgogne, a very fertile province. I have another in Berry, where my grandfather owned a very handsome château."

"I have three farms in the department of Seine-et-Oise," said La Thomassinière quickly, smoothing his chin; "I own two houses in Paris, and I am on the point of buying a third."

"My grandparents were enormously rich!" said the marquis. "I haven't a very clear idea how much I have left! I worry very little about it. When a person has

credit and is in favor at court—Why, if I wanted half a dozen offices, I should only have to say the word!”

“My credit is unlimited! My paper is eagerly sought after at the Bourse! I am swamped with business. I receive the very best society at my house, and my guests play for infernally high stakes!”

“Pardieu! that reminds me that I lost three thousand francs at écarté the day before yesterday,” said the marquis carelessly.

“I won four thousand two days ago, at the house of a banker, who’s a friend of mine,” replied La Thomassinière instantly.

“Oh! that’s a mere trifle! When I play, I do it for the sake of doing something!” said the marquis.

“To be sure,” said La Thomassinière; “I am not sure that I didn’t forget to take the four thousand francs from the table, I pay so little attention to money!”

“But a month ago,” said the marquis, “I was in a really serious game—the stakes were no less than eighty thousand francs.”

“I staked a house last winter,” rejoined La Thomassinière; “it was not built, to be sure, and unluckily the contractor failed the next day, for the third time.”

Auguste listened in silence to his two neighbors, as they tossed the ball back and forth. But at last La Thomassinière, fearing that he might be unable to think of anything with which to cap the marquis’s next boast, changed the subject.

“What do you think of this view?” he asked.

“Very pretty,” the marquis replied; “but why not have embellished it with some picturesque ruins—*fabriques*—here and there?”

“Oh! I didn’t want any factories—*fabriques*—on my property! The idea! Workmen are noisy, always

singing, and I don't choose to have anything to do with that sort of people."

The marquis glanced at Auguste with a smile, and they left the grotto for the billiard-room, where Monsieur de la Thomassinière missed every shot, and exclaimed after every stroke that he misplayed:

"The trouble is that I've got a crooked cue; I can't see straight to-day; it's the fault of the table; my head aches; something's the matter with me; I'm not in the mood for playing; but if I were, you would be nowhere."

Little Tony had arrived long before and had handed his master the fresh supply of funds. When the marquis saw that Dalville had a cabriolet, he manifested great friendliness for him, and declared that there was sympathy between Auguste's tastes and his—a sympathy which Auguste had not observed, although that fact did not prevent his responding to Monsieur de Cligneval's advances.

The dinner-hour arrived, and they went to the table, where Athalie did the honors with much grace. Not to depart from his custom, La Thomassinière did not appear in the dining-room until the soup had been removed; but he was delighted to say before the marquis that he had ten important letters to write.

The dinner was even more agreeable than the morning repast, because they knew one another better, and delicious wines heated their brains and urged them on to folly. Athalie had the knack of keeping the party in good humor by her sallies. The marquis thought her divine, entrancing, and confounded himself in compliments. The petite-maitresse was not ambitious to fascinate a man of fifty, but she was very glad to earn the praise of a marquis; and the young men were not jealous of the marquis; so that there was nothing to mar the

general jollity. They allowed La Thomassinière to talk endlessly of his farms, his wealth, his speculations; but they applauded him when he extolled his wines and his cook.

They left the table as merry as well-bred people can be. Athalie went to see if her harp was in tune. The men went into the garden for a breath of fresh air. It was not dark as yet, but the light was fading.

The marquis had sauntered away, and Auguste was left alone with La Thomassinière, who also claimed to be congenial to him, when, as they strolled along a shaded path which was quite dark, and which skirted the orchard, they heard the report of a hearty kiss. Auguste halted, curious to know what was going on. La Thomassinière followed suit, with an air of amazement.

"Did you hear?" he asked Auguste.

"Yes," was the reply, "I heard very distinctly."

"What was it?"

"If you didn't recognize the sound, it is useless for me to tell you what it was."

"Why, it seemed to me—but in the dark one may be mistaken."

"Indeed! do you think that one doesn't hear as well by night as by day?"

"The fact is that I can't believe that anybody on my premises would venture——"

The sound of the second kiss interrupted him. The two gentlemen walked toward a clump of shrubbery near by, and saw Mademoiselle Tapotte in the marquis's arms, defending herself very feebly, as her custom was; while the marquis, with flushed face, gleaming eye and thick voice, said to her:

"On my honor, you are a rose-bud, and I will have an assignation."

But the rustling of the foliage caused the marquis to release his hold; Tapotte ran away, and Monsieur de Cligneval returned to the house, while Auguste said laughingly to La Thomassinière:

"It seems that your champagne changes the aspect of things: that mass of flesh has become a rose-bud."

"Oh! that is court language. The marquis was joking, no doubt. However, I should have been terribly sorry to have him see us! A marquis, you know! I ought not to have seen anything! Monsieur Dalville, I urge you to maintain absolute secrecy about this matter; it is very important."

"Never fear!"

"I ask you to promise me."

Having quieted his host's fears, Auguste returned to the house with him. Athalie took her place at the harp; the gentlemen seated themselves at a card-table, and, while listening to the harmonious strains that the young woman extracted from the instrument, they did their best to win their opponents' money. Tea was served, then punch. The marquis won from everybody; but he was so courteous, his manners were so amiable, that one was almost tempted to thank him for condescending to take one's money. Athalie, fatigued by the ball of the preceding night, retired early; and ere long all the guests withdrew to their rooms.

The weather was superb and the soft moonlight seemed to invite one to enjoy the cool evening air. Auguste stole quietly downstairs, dressed in an ample robe de chambre which he had found in his room, and walked through the garden toward the orchard. I am not sure whether he went there solely in search of coolness, but when he reached the grove of fruit trees, where it was very dark, he vanished among the plums and cherries. At last, after

wandering about for some time, he found himself before the building which the gardener had pointed out to him. He drew near; he heard voices and recognized La Thomassinière's. The young man concluded that he had arrived too late; however, he listened to what his host had to say to Mademoiselle Tapotte.

"Monsieur le marquis kissed you, my dear girl."

"Me, monsieur! oh, nenni! nobody didn't kiss me."

"Remember, Tapotte, that I am your master, and that I have a right to know everything."

"I don't know what you want to know!"

"Monsieur le marquis kissed you."

"What's a marquis?"

"A magnificent man! rather short and fat, almost bald, about fifty years old, and with an eye-glass—*lorgnon*—on one side."

"Oh! he's a marquis, is he? I don't know whether he had an onion—*ognon*—on one side, but he smelt pretty strong of liquor—I know that."

"Don't think that I mean to scold you, Tapotte; far from it! I simply want to know what he said to you, so as to do it like a marquis, when I have the opportunity."

"Why, bless me, he went about it the same way they all do. In the first place, he squeezed me."

"Good."

"Then he squeezed me again."

"Good."

"Oh, yes! good! good!—I yelled."

"You did wrong, he was a marquis!"

"I don't care, when he hurt me. And then—well since it amuses you, why, he kissed me."

"Good."

"He wouldn't let me go; he swore I'd got to say I'd meet him; but I wouldn't."

"You were wrong! You're a fool, Tapotte! You shouldn't have refused monsieur le marquis."

"Bah! get along with you! He's old and he's ugly!"

This conversation suggested an idea to our hare-brained youth; he wrapped his head in his handkerchief, and began to cough and spit, imitating the decidedly nasal notes of the marquis.

"Mon Dieu! there's some one outside!" cried La Thomassinière.

"Yes, some old fellow coughing," replied Tapotte.

"Why! it's he—it's the marquis. Fool that you are! Why didn't you admit that you told him where you lived?"

"I swear, monsieur, that I——"

"Hush! hold your tongue! he's there and he's getting impatient."

"Jarni! he's got the catarrh, that man has!"

"Faith, I cannot hesitate.—Monsieur le marquis! What an honor! I will jump out of this window in the rear."

"But don't I tell you, monsieur, that I didn't say I'd meet him——"

La Thomassinière was no longer listening; he had opened a window and jumped out, and was in the garden. At the same moment, Auguste opened the door, and entered the gardener's abode. When she saw that it was not the marquis, she uttered a cry of surprise; but Auguste whispered to her to keep quiet, and Mademoiselle Tapotte did whatever the young man wished, much preferring a tête-à-tête with him to one with monsieur le marquis.

La Thomassinière walked about under the apricot trees, presuming that the marquis would not remain long with Tapotte; but after half an hour, as his guest

did not leave the gardener's house, our financier decided to go to bed.

"The deuce!" he said to himself; "the marquis seems to have had a long story to tell her. I must try to make my interviews last as long as monsieur le marquis's."

The next day the company assembled preparatory to starting for Paris. Athalie was fresher than on the evening before, the marquis less flushed. Auguste seemed fatigued and La Thomassinière's expression was very sly as he looked at the nobleman. Mademoiselle Tapotte alone was just as usual.

They entered their carriages and left the charming retreat at Fleury. Let us follow their example, and return to Paris.

X

THE INN

To console himself in his master's absence, Bertrand had sent for the concierge to come up and keep him company. This concierge was an old German named Schtrack, who had come to France to make trousers, and, having found employment as a concierge, passed his time in drinking, smoking, and in beating his wife. He was by no means capable of carrying on a conversation, even with a cook; but he would drink, and listen with imperturbable stolidity to Bertrand's stories of his campaigns, and to the minute details which the ex-corporal delighted to repeat, often for the twentieth time. Schtrack always seemed to take the same deep interest

in them, keeping his eye fixed on the narrator, moving his head or frowning when the battle waxed hot, and emitting a cloud of tobacco smoke and a *sacretié!* when Bertrand paused for breath.

After assuring themselves that the burgundy was not spoiling, they had subjected the claret and the madeira to the same test. The more Bertrand talked, the thirstier he became; now he must have been exceedingly thirsty, for he had talked steadily from the preceding evening; the two worthies having passed the night doing what they called "tasting the cellar," and Schtrack having left Bertrand's side but twice, to administer chastisement after the German style to his wife, who presumed to find fault because her husband did not come down to his lodge.

Bertrand sometimes interrupted the narrative of his campaigns to talk about Auguste, to whom he was devotedly attached, and to confide to Schtrack his anxiety on account of his lieutenant's senseless extravagance and his penchant for women; and Schtrack listened to it as he listened to the story of Austerlitz, ejaculating *sacretié!* from time to time.

Although his patience was tried by hearing nothing else all night, Bertrand nevertheless said to Schtrack:

"Tell me, old fellow, what can I do to keep Monsieur Dalville from ruining himself?"

Schtrack, who had never before been questioned by Bertrand, reflected fully five minutes before he replied:

"Sacretié! let's take a drink."

"Yes, let's take a drink, that's well said," rejoined Bertrand, touching the concierge's glass with his; "but it doesn't answer my question. I love and respect Monsieur Dalville; I would jump into the fire for him; but, thunder and guns! it breaks my heart to see him

pay out money for this one, lend to that one, play for infernally high stakes, spend money in foolish extravagance, and, last of all, injure his health; for what man could stand such a life? And most of those pretty hussies deceive him, I'll bet! But he won't listen to me. The heart is all right, oh! the heart is first-class, but the head——"

"Sacretié!" said Schtrack, emptying his glass.

"For instance, that little woman who lives in this house, for all her soft voice and her eyes always on the floor, and although she's fainted three times on learning of my master's perfidy, I wouldn't swear—I have imagined several times that I've seen a little man rushing upstairs as if there was a squad of police at his heels.—Do you know who I mean, Schtrack?"

"Ya! ya!"

"Well, who is that little man?"

"I don't know."

"As concierge, you should know."

"You'd petter ask mein vife."

The sound of Dalville's carriage wheels put an end to the conversation. Schtrack went down to his quarters, and Bertrand tried to assume a sedate air with which to receive his master.

"Here I am, my dear Bertrand," said Auguste, as he entered his apartment; "I passed a delightful day yesterday. Oh! don't scold me; I was virtuous—that is, so far as circumstances allowed me to be. Has anybody been here during my absence?"

"Yes, monsieur: in the first place, Mademoiselle Virginie."

"Poor Virginie! she must be angry with me for neglecting her for more than three weeks."

"She says that she shall die of grief."

"Oh! she has said that to me so often!"

"She breakfasted here; she ate cold fowl and pie."

"Very good; evidently her grief isn't dangerous as yet."

"While she was breakfasting, your neighbor, Madame Saint-Edmond, came to ask me if I'd seen her poodle; she wanted also to speak to monsieur about a matter that she said was important. She came in, and the two of them waited a long while for you."

"What! were they here together?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Gad! that must have been amusing!"

"Amusing, if you choose to call it so! I was afraid for a minute that it was going to be serious."

"Oh! you see the dark side of everything."

"I assure you, monsieur, that those ladies didn't look at the bright side, either of 'em. They went away at last. Mademoiselle Virginie went to see an Englishman, who is to buy a linen-draper's shop for her."

"Bertrand, you're a slanderer."

"I am simply repeating what she said, monsieur."

"I will go up to-night and see Léonie. What next?"

"Monsieur Destival came to see you; he seemed full of business."

"Oh, yes! he has spoken to me very often lately about an excellent investment in which I can get ten per cent for my money."

"I advise you to get as large a per cent as you can, monsieur; for we are running through the funds pretty fast."

"That is true; I must put my affairs in a better condition."

"Yes, that wouldn't be a bad idea."

"I have been obliged to sell a farm already."

"Poor farm! When I think of it, it makes me feel sad."

"Don't be alarmed, Bertrand, I propose to cut down my expenses after this. I will see Destival, and if he can still find a profitable investment for my money, I shall recover what I have thrown away. Come, my old comrade, no moping; it does no good. I am young and rich. You must agree that I have no reason to despair as yet."

"That is so, lieutenant; that's what I said to myself when Schtrack and I were inspecting the cellar, to make sure that everything was all right."

"You did very well, Bertrand; inspect, superintend, manage everything to suit yourself. I am going to change my clothes; then I will go up to see my neighbor; and to-morrow I will attend to more serious affairs."

"Excellent young man!" said Bertrand, following Auguste with his eyes. "He leaves me in control here. But tasting his wines isn't the whole thing; that isn't enough; I propose to make myself useful to him in spite of him, and I will go down and have a talk with Madame Schtrack about the little man who goes up to our neighbor's room."

Madame Saint-Edmond greeted Auguste with an offended air; she was melancholy, her eyes were red, she still held her handkerchief in her hand. It is true that, as she had learned of Auguste's return, she was expecting a call from him. Dalville inquired sympathetically what the cause of her depression might be; she refused to confide in him; but she let drop a word or two concerning the woman she had met in his rooms; these words were followed by stifled sighs and sarcastic laughter, and Madame Saint-Edmond added to each of her comments:

"You are entirely at liberty, monsieur, to receive whomever you choose."

Auguste, touched by Léonie's apparent suffering, succeeded in tranquillizing the pretty blonde, who consented at last to make peace with her neighbor on condition that she should never again meet in his rooms that woman who had made impertinent speeches to her, and the mere sight of whom would throw her into hysterics. Auguste promised; in love, as in politics, one always makes more promises than one intends to keep.

But Léonie was still pensive and preoccupied.

"Something is troubling you," said Auguste.

"No; oh, no! nothing, I assure you," replied the pretty blonde, in a tone which meant the exact opposite.

"But it is perfectly evident to me that you are concealing something from me."

"Why, no, you are mistaken; at all events it doesn't concern you at all."

As we are always anxious to know what does not concern us, Auguste became more insistent; he demanded that she should tell him all, whereupon Madame Saint-Edmond confessed in a low, silvery voice that a milliner, to whom she had owed two thousand francs for a long time, had forced her to give him a note; that that note would come due in two days, and that she was sorely embarrassed about paying it.

Auguste regretted that he had been so inquisitive; but it was too late to retreat; besides, he was too fond of obliging his friends not to come to his neighbor's assistance.

"Send the holder of the note to my apartment," he said; "Bertrand will pay it."

Léonie refused; she was afraid of inconveniencing Auguste; she would be terribly distressed to have him

think that her selfish interests had any influence upon the sentiment he aroused in her. But Auguste insisted, he did not choose that she should have recourse to others; and Léonie consented at last to allow herself to be accommodated, on condition that it should be considered a loan, which she would repay to her friend.

Bertrand leaped backward when Auguste said to him next day:

"You will pay Madame Saint-Edmond's note for two thousand francs which the holder will present here."

"Two thousand francs for that little minx!" cried the ex-corporal, beating his brow in desperation. "Ah! lieutenant, if this is the way you put your affairs in order!"

"No comments, Bertrand; I am only lending Léonie the money, and if I ever find myself in difficulties, I am sure that there is no sacrifice of which that woman would not be capable, to oblige me."

"You may believe that, monsieur, but I——"

"You will pay the note, Bertrand."

"I will pay it, lieutenant."

Auguste went out singing, and Bertrand went down to his friend Schtrack's, to question his wife.

Bertrand paid the note and Léonie was more loving than ever with Auguste. But one morning, when she did not expect him, Dalville found in his neighbor's room a little man, who instantly took his leave with a very low bow, which Madame Saint-Edmond barely acknowledged, dismissing her gentleman in a very curt tone.

"Who is that man?" Auguste inquired when the stranger had gone.

"Mon Dieu! that is a very ridiculous individual, whom one of my aunts sent to me. He is fresh from the provinces and is seeking employment. But, as he is a

terrible bore to me, I receive him in such fashion that he soon brings his visits to an end. He's as stupid as he is ugly."

"Why, he didn't strike me as being so very ugly."

"Bah! how did you look at him? He is horrible! A hideous nose and sunken eyes, and such an awkward, ridiculous figure! Oh! I can't endure the man."

Auguste pushed his questions no farther and said no more about the little man; but he was secretly vexed to hear her speak so ill of him, because he knew the tactics of ladies of her stamp, who often employ that method to conceal their intimacy with a person.

On returning to his own rooms, Auguste noticed that Bertrand looked at him with a sly expression, and hovered about him as if he were seeking an opportunity to speak to him.

"You want to tell me or ask me something, I see, Bertrand," said Auguste, stopping in front of the corporal. "Speak, for heaven's sake, instead of prowling about me in this way. You have no comprehension, my old friend, of the little wiles of the ladies, who, when they have anything to say to us, have the art to force us to question them."

"True, lieutenant, you're right; it's better to go straight to the point without countermarching. You must have met a certain little man at the neighbor's, for I saw him come down just after you went up."

"Well, yes, I did see a gentleman there; what of it?"

"What of it! Is this the first time you've met him?"

"Yes."

"He goes there often, however."

"Who told you that?"

"Madame Schtrack, the concierge."

"What, Bertrand! do you chatter and talk gossip with a concierge?"

"Gossip! no, lieutenant; ten thousand cartridges! I! gossip! Do you call what I've just told you gossip, lieutenant?"

"Why, pretty nearly. Is not Madame de Saint-Edmond at liberty to receive visits? Does she owe me an account of all her callers? What right have I to set spies on her acts? and if anyone should give her a faithful report of mine, do you think that she would have no reason to reproach me?"

"True, lieutenant; I am in the wrong. I'll go on drinking with Schtrack, but I won't talk with his wife any more, because I don't want it said that an old moustache like me talks gossip."

Although he had scolded Bertrand, Auguste remembered Madame Schtrack's statement; and, when he thought of the abuse Léonie had heaped upon the little man, he could not avoid conceiving some suspicions. We may agree that we do not deserve a faithful mistress, but we can never forgive her for her infidelity.

"Léonie must be horribly false, horribly treacherous!" said Auguste to himself. "Why need she pretend to love me, unless she retains her hold on me for selfish reasons, or unless she loves two men at once? Such things have been known."

As he walked down Boulevard Montmartre, Auguste felt a light touch on his arm. He turned; Mademoiselle Virginie stood before him.

"I am very lucky to meet you, monsieur," she said, looking at Auguste with a certain expression in which there was something most seductive; indeed, Mademoiselle Virginie made many conquests, because she had adopted the habit of imparting that alluring expression

to her eyes; and although Auguste knew her glances by heart, he still took delight in looking at her, especially when it was a long time since her lovely black eyes had been fastened upon him.

"Oh! although you look at me with a smile," she continued, "that doesn't prevent me from being horribly angry with you."

"Really? you are angry with me?"

"Monsieur, I beg you not to address me so familiarly! Have we ever been on intimate terms?"

As she spoke, Mademoiselle Virginie burst into a roar of laughter that caused several passers-by to turn their heads; for in Paris very little is required to attract the attention of the passers-by. In fact, there was one man who stopped, and who, presumably because he had never in his life heard anyone laugh, was about to ask Virginie what the matter was; but a glance from Auguste led him to walk on.

"You make me laugh, when I haven't the slightest inclination to," said Virginie, suddenly assuming a most serious air.

"What's the matter with you? Come, tell me your troubles; you know very well that I am your friend."

"My friend! oh, yes! You are just nothing at all! A pretty friend, to go two months without seeing me!"

"It wasn't my fault—I have been busy."

"Indeed! busy, eh? I know what kind of business. The blonde of the third floor, and the lady in the country, and this one, and the other one! It's no use talking, you're a thorough scamp, you're not a bit agreeable any more! You used to be agreeable to me now and then."

"Why didn't you come to see me?"

"Oh! I say! do you think I haven't anything else to do but that? Don't I have to work?"

"Ah! you work, do you?"

"Indeed I do; I have reformed now, I never go out."

"Do you still live in the same place?"

"No, I have moved."

"Why, you do nothing but move."

"Really, my dear, I have sold my furniture."

"Sold your furniture? What a pity!"

"Listen to me; I couldn't live on nut shells, could I?"

"No, they wouldn't be good for the stomach; but as you are working——"

"Oh, yes! it's very amusing; work a whole day to earn fifteen sous! Mon Dieu! how I wish I were a man!"

"What for?"

"So as not to be a woman. I know that there are some women who are happy, who swim in pleasure, who have feathers and velvet caps! Ah! a velvet cap's becoming to me; I tried one on at a friend's. I propose to have one this winter, all velvet, with gold tassels."

"With your fifteen sous a day?"

"Go on! No, but I sold my furniture because I owed some money; I was four terms behind with my rent, and I had to pay."

"Why, I should say that, the term before the last, I——"

"No, I used that for something else. I am living with a friend until I get more furniture. Oh! you can't imagine——"

"What, pray?"

"I am going to be married."

"Nonsense! really?"

"Faith, yes! It's a man who's mad over me; he adores me; he's turning yellow with it."

"Try to marry him before he gets too dark."

"No, I was joking; but really, joking aside, he's a very good match—a magnificent man!"

"How old?"

"Forty."

"What does he do?"

"He's a government clerk; he has a very fine place."

"Well, my dear girl, marry at once; it seems to me that that is the very best thing that you can do."

"Ah! how happy I would make that man, if I married him!"

"Well said; that purpose does you honor."

"Oh, no! that's not it; you don't understand me. I mean that he would be enchanted if I would consent to take him for my husband."

"Ah! that makes a difference. But what deters you?"

"The trouble is that I don't love him."

"What's that? such a magnificent man!"

"Yes, but his legs are a little bowed."

"You must make him wear a frock coat."

"And then he has a nose of such length—my dear, you can't conceive what it is! His nose frightens me."

"I never knew you to be so timid."

"The fact is, I don't want to marry. Later, we'll see about it. Do you know, I am strongly inclined to go on the stage?"

"Ah! that's something new."

"Tell me, do you think I'd be very bad? You see, I have a good voice when I choose. Do you know that I'm as pretty as a love, on the stage?"

"You have no need to be on the stage for that, madame."

"Dieu! how genteel! But really, no joking, rouge and the bright light and the footlights—all those things make me a dazzling sight. I have tried on Iphigénie's

costume, and it's surprising how becoming it is. I had an offer to go into the chorus at the Vaudeville, but that didn't tempt me much."

"Not to play Iphigénie?"

"No; how stupid you are! It was to get accustomed to the boards and the audience, as they say, and to looking into the auditorium. What do you advise me to do?"

"I? nothing; do what you choose; but, if you really have a chance to marry, that would be much better than going on the stage."

"Bless my soul! you talk like my aunt. But it's true that I could never be an actress; if I went on the stage and saw all those faces looking at me, I know that I should laugh like a lunatic. But I say, are we going to stand on this same spot till to-morrow? People will take us for spies. Where are you going?"

"I am going to Monsieur Destival's on a matter of business."

"He is that tall, lanky, ugly creature I've seen you with sometimes in a carriage?"

"It is quite possible."

"Ah! what a funny face he has! That man reminds me of one of Séraphin's marionettes—you know, the one that sings *tire lon pha* in *Le Pont Cassé*."

"You will always be the same, won't you?"

"Why, a body must laugh once in a while. Look you, Auguste, you can go to your Monsieur Destival's another day; to-day I don't propose to leave you."

"But, really, I have some business."

"So much the worse! It makes you very unhappy to think of passing a day with me, don't it?"

"No, of course not; but there is to be a musical party at Madame de la Thomassinière's this evening, and I promised to be there."

"You can sing when you get up to-morrow, if you like music so much; but to-day, monsieur, you stay with me; we will go into the country to dinner, and to-night you will take me to the theatre; you've been promising me this for a long while."

It was impossible to resist Mademoiselle Virginie, and Auguste yielded with a good grace.

"We will take a cab," he said, "and go wherever you choose in the country."

"Why not take your cabriolet? why go in a cab with wretched nags, when you have a lovely horse that goes like the wind?"

Auguste, who chose to remain *incognito* with Virginie, preferred a cab, in which he would not be seen. There was a stand nearby; he helped his companion in, saying:

"Where shall we go?"

"Where you please."

"It makes no difference to me."

"Nor to me."

"But we must decide. Shall it be the Champs-Elysées?"

"Oh! there are too many people there."

"Vincennes?"

"Too far."

"Vaugirard?"

"A pretty kind of country, with not a tree anywhere about!"

"Sceaux?"

"Too fashionable! I am not dressed."

"Montmartre?"

"To look at quarries and donkeys?"

"Saint-Denis?"

"There's nothing nice there but cheese-cakes, and I prefer the ones in the Passage des Panoramas."

"Belleville?"

"That's a little vulgar, but it's amusing; besides, I have a decided penchant for Près Saint-Gervais and Romainville wood."

"Belleville it is, then. Off we go, driver!"

The cabman lashed his horse. Virginie was in a merry mood; with her the annoyances of yesterday, the cares of to-morrow vanished before the enjoyment of the moment. For his part, Auguste was not sorry to have his mind diverted from the thoughts that disturbed him concerning Madame Saint-Edmond, whom he had told that he expected to pass the evening at Monsieur de la Thomassinière's.

They reached the Belleville barrier; it took the cabman half an hour to drive his nags up the hill, and when they reached the Ile d'Amour, they refused to go any farther. But Virginie was very glad to walk in the fields, so they alighted, dismissed the cab, and took a narrow road to the left, which led to Prés Saint-Gervais.

The sight of the green grass and trees made Virginie sentimental; she sighed as they strolled along the avenues of lilacs, where several cottages had recently been built.

"How ridiculous," she cried, "to build houses everywhere, even in the fields! you might as well go to walk in your bedroom. It used to be so pretty here! We lunched on fresh eggs over there once—do you remember? We drank beer under that arbor. And that restaurant, in the woods, just beyond the keeper's, where we went several times—the one where they have private rooms."

"Oh, yes! the Tournebride."

"The Tournebride, that's it. Ungrateful wretch! doesn't that name recall any memories?"

"Yes, it reminds me of a certain fowl that we could not succeed in carving."

"Indeed! it reminds you of nothing but a fowl! You are not at all romantic to-day."

"Do you want to dine there?"

"I not only want to, but I insist upon it. It's rather far away, but the walk will give us an appetite."

"Besides, we can rest on the way."

"Oh! since people have built everywhere, there are no nice places to rest."

They ran along, throwing leaves and grass at each other and plucking an occasional wild flower. At last they reached the sandy soil of the woods, and Virginie sighed again when she saw that the trees had been felled on large tracts, and that building was in progress there also.

"These people seem to have determined on the destruction of Romainville forest!" she said.

"It will grow again, my dear."

"Oh, yes! but meanwhile we shan't grow again. How indifferent men are! they don't get attached to anything. Think of the love ciphers that we carved with a knife on the bark of an oak tree; I looked forward to seeing them again. There was an A and a V intertwined in a heart."

"They probably served to warm some old annuitant's feet, or to boil the kettle for some respectable family."

"That's it—make soup with my heart; that's very pleasant to think of! I shan't cut any more letters on trees.—Ah! here's the Tournebride luckily; I was afraid they'd cut that down too."

The Tournebride was the most famous restaurant in Romainville forest; but for all that, it would not have been safe to order a *charlotte russe* there, or a *karik à l'Indienne*, because the landlord would have thought

that you were talking Tartar, or making fun of him, and would tell you to go to Noisy-le-Sec for your dinner. But if you confined your ambition to a bill-of-fare dainty enough for the worthy bourgeois of Rue Saint-Denis, and very popular among the young work-girls who came to Romainville with their sweethearts, you might be certain of being satisfied at the Tournebride, which is only three gun-shots from the keeper's lodge, on the road leading to Romainville village.

Auguste and Virginie entered the inn, and, as is usual in country restaurants, they went through the kitchen to reach the salons and the private rooms. They enjoyed the sight of veal-stews, cutlets, and beef *piqué*; and as such restaurants had no printed bill-of-fare, the kitchen took the place of one. When you walked through, you saw all the saucepans, and you inhaled the combined odors of five or six ragouts, which might stand you instead of soup, but which was less agreeable after you had dined.

The host welcomed his guests with a smiling face, his cotton cap over his ear; as he answered questions he ran from one saucepan to another, and spitted a pigeon as he extolled his beefsteak.

"Let's make up our minds at once what we'll have," said Virginie, who was accustomed to country restaurants. "Is the beefsteak tender?"

"Oh! delicious, madame."

"With kidneys, eh, my friend?"

"Yes, they are essential.—Have you any kidneys, monsieur l'hôte?"

"Here, monsieur, just smell this," said the landlord, holding a saucepan under Auguste's nose. "I won't tell you, as my confrères in Paris do, that they're stewed in champagne, but I'll swear it's white wine, and delicious."

"Very good."

"And a pigeon pie, if you please, delicious also."

"Some asparagus and lettuce."

"If monsieur would like a fine omelette soufflée?"

"Ah, yes! I remember very well that you make very good ones."

"Yes, monsieur; they puff up like a cotton nightcap."

"Let us have an omelette soufflée then. Give us a private room, please."

"Take monsieur and madame to the unoccupied room on the first floor."

A waiter, who was no longer young, but who smiled all the time, escorted the newcomers to a room that looked on the forest.

"Why not give us the room opposite?" asked Virginie; "the outlook is better, we can see the road."

"There is somebody there, madame—a party."

"In that case, let us stay here," said Auguste.

The waiter laid the table, then left the room, saying:

"I will go and see to the dinner; if monsieur wants anything before it is ready, he can call."

That meant that he would not come up unless he was called. Such people are almost as cunning in the country as in Paris.

Auguste did not call for some time, because they felt that they must rest before dinner, and moreover the private rooms of the Tournebride made Mademoiselle Virginie very romantic; at all events, that is what she told Auguste, laughing like a madcap, which, by the way, is not romantic; but Mademoiselle Virginie had a way of her own of being romantic.

At last the stomach made itself heard; and in face of that domineering master, all illusions vanish. The most romantic of mortals, standing in rapt admiration before

a rushing torrent or a waterfall, is compelled to make an end when the dinner-bell rings. Virginie and Auguste were admiring neither a torrent nor a waterfall; I am not certain that they were absorbed in admiration of anything; but I know that they opened their door and beat a tattoo upon it with knife handles—a method of attracting attention which makes bells unnecessary.

The waiter brought up the dinner, to which they did justice; the beefsteak and kidneys were in truth delicious, and they had no ground for complaint. While the waiter was present, Mademoiselle Virginie, who was reasonably curious, expressed surprise that the party opposite should be so silent that they did not hear voices, whereas, ordinarily, the guests at country restaurants are very noisy. The young woman concluded her remarks by asking the waiter:

“Isn’t it a large party?”

The old waiter replied, smiling so as to show the whole of his three remaining teeth:

“It’s no larger than yours.”

“Oho! a party of two, is it?”

“Yes, madame.”

“A man and a woman?”

“Yes, madame.”

“They seem to be even more romantic than we are; they have forgotten about dinner.”

“Oh! the dinner’s all ordered, it’s coming up directly. I know their ways; they’re regulars.”

And the waiter left the room, closing at the same moment his mouth and the door, the latter of which he had been holding ajar.

“You are very inquisitive,” said Auguste, “to want to know how many people there are opposite. What difference does it make to us what others say and do?”

"Oh! none at all; but, don't you know, I like to see—it amuses me."

"Let us eat and not worry about our neighbors; that will be the better way."

"It don't interfere with my eating!—Wait! they're opening the door."

And at that moment a man's voice in the corridor called:

"Bring up the dinner, waiter."

"It's the man calling," said Virginie; "he's got a little soprano voice, but the voice don't prove anything at all."

"Will you have some pigeon?"

"Do wait a minute; you're hurrying me too much."

Just then they heard a woman's voice saying:

"My friend, you forgot to order fritters."

Auguste gave a jump when he heard that voice; and Virginie, alarmed by his abrupt movement, asked:

"Well! what's struck you now? Did you swallow a pigeon wing the wrong way?"

"No, nothing's the matter. It was that voice that surprised me; I thought that I recognized——"

"Ah, yes! I understand; it is probably some old flame of monsieur who's in yonder room. Well! what then? Do you think that you ought to think about any other woman when you're with me? That's very polite. Does it make any difference to you who the woman's with? Are you still in love with her? If I knew that you were, I'd go and make a row."

"Why, no; there's no question of love, but it's because——"

"Because, because—You don't know what you're saying. Eat your dinner at once. Why don't you eat?"

"I am not hungry any more."

"Indeed! monsieur has ceased to be hungry since he heard that lady's voice, which has taken away his appetite. How touching! What are you getting up for? Where are you going?"

"I am going downstairs a minute."

"I don't want you to leave the room. You don't need to go downstairs. You want to see that woman opposite, that's all; but you shan't see her."

As she spoke, Virginie rose too, and planted herself in front of the door.

"I assure you, my dear love, that I do need to go down," said Auguste, gently taking Virginie's arm in order to put her away from the door.

"My good fellow, I don't care what happens, but you shall not leave this room."

Auguste, laughing all the while, succeeded in removing Virginie from the position she was determined to defend. She flew into a rage; the door was partly open and Auguste attempted to go out; but she caught him by his coat tails and the struggle began anew. At last, Virginie's strength being exhausted, she suddenly released her hold. Auguste plunged into the corridor, and collided with the waiter who was bringing his neighbors their soup, splashed the julienne against the wall, hurled the tureen to the floor, and caused him who carried it to stumble and stagger.

At the outcry emitted by the waiter and the crash of the soup-tureen, the two persons in the other room, divining that it was their dinner that had come to grief, instantly opened their door, and Auguste, who was still in the hall, saw Madame de Saint-Edmond, and the little man whom she held in horror.

At first Léonie's glance did not fall on Auguste; she saw nobody but the waiter, who was picking up the

fragments of the tureen, exclaiming: "That's too bad! luckily no one's hurt."

But Auguste suddenly appeared at the door of the room and bowed to Léonie.

"I am distressed, madame, to have upset your soup."

Léonie raised her eyes, gave a shriek, and fainted. That was the best thing that she could do under the circumstances. The little man, who also had recognized Dalville, and who was afraid of being challenged to fight a duel, leaped over the stooping waiter, and rushing down the stairs four at a time, left the Tournebride and plunged into the woods, without casting a glance behind. Virginie, who had left her room, exclaimed in surprise when she recognized Auguste's neighbor in the unconscious woman; and the waiter, thinking that everybody was shouting because of the soup, kept repeating:

"It's nothing, messieurs, mesdames; don't get excited; there's more downstairs; we always have plenty of julienne."

Virginie's anger had vanished and she laughed as if she would die. Auguste looked at Léonie, who sat in her chair, with her head thrown back, and did not open her eyes; while the waiter, seeing nothing of what took place inside the room, went downstairs, crying:

"I'll bring up some more soup; it'll only take a minute."

Meanwhile Virginie had walked up to Madame Saint-Edmond, and, taking the mustard pot from the table, had held it under her nose; with the result that the pretty blonde instantly recovered consciousness and cast a languid glance on the person who had been so attentive. But when she recognized Virginie, her expression changed, and she roughly pushed away the mustard pot which that young lady was holding to her nose.

"Does madame feel better?" queried Virginie, imitating Léonie's mellifluous tone.

The latter, choking with rage, rose and said in a trembling voice:

"I don't need anything."

"Come, my dear love," said Auguste, "we must not intrude upon madame any longer; I deeply regret that I frightened her companion away. But doubtless the gentleman is only awaiting our departure, to return; we must not compel him to stay in the kitchen any longer. Let's go and finish our dinner."

"Yes, let's go back and eat our omelette soufflée," said Virginie, with a profound curtsy to Léonie, and she returned to her seat at the table in the other room. Auguste was about to do likewise, when Léonie ran to him, raising her eyes to the ceiling, and said in an undertone:

"You judge me by appearances; but I swear to you——"

"Oh! upon my word, this is too much," cried Auguste; and he angrily slammed the door in Madame Saint-Edmond's face, exclaiming: "Take a woman in the act, and she would still say: 'Don't judge by appearances.'"

Virginie was overjoyed by the incident; she joked Auguste about his neighbor's fidelity, and he tried to laugh with her, although at heart he was not over-pleased that he had allowed himself to be hoodwinked. They finished their dinner at last and were about to leave their room and the Tournebride, when they heard loud voices, and recognized those of the inn-keeper and of Madame Saint-Edmond.

"Madame," said the former, "you can't go away like this; I must be paid for my dinner."

"Monsieur," replied Madame de Saint-Edmond, imparting a moving intonation to her voice, "I am very sorry, but you must believe that I had no intention——"

"I see, madame, that you have an intention to go away; your friend went off like a shot just now; who is to pay me for my dinner, I should like to know?"

"But, monsieur," rejoined Léonie, and her voice became a little less pathetic, "after all, we didn't dine; so we don't owe you anything."

"What's that? you don't owe anything, madame! When a dinner's ordered, and such care taken with it as with this one, do you think it isn't to be paid for? Do you propose to leave your fillets and sweetbreads on my hands? It isn't my fault that you don't choose to eat."

"You can give them to some other party, monsieur."

"You had a bottle of old macon when you got here; and there's the soup wasted, and the broken tureen."

"That's none of my affair, monsieur."

"Your dinner's your affair, madame; eat it and pay for it."

"I don't feel well, I tell you."

"Pay for it then."

"But I have no money with me."

"You shouldn't have let your friend run off as if he'd seen the devil! A man ought not to leave a woman in a false position! The deuce! decent people don't do that! He must be a nice kind of fellow, to disappear with the money. You shouldn't go into a restaurant when you don't mean to dine."

"Monsieur," retorted Madame Saint-Edmond, with an angry ring in her voice, "this isn't the first time we've come here to dinner; do you take us for riff-raff?"

"No, madame; of course I know perfectly well who I'm dealing with, but I don't choose to give credit; a

fine dinner like this ought not to be refused when it's all cooked."

During this dialogue, Auguste had all the difficulty in keeping Virginie from laughing aloud. At last, moved to pity by the sentimental Léonie's plight, he went downstairs, followed by Virginie, and said to the landlord, who did not take his eyes from Madame Saint-Edmond:

"As I have the honor to know madame, I beg you to add the amount of her bill to mine, monsieur; I will pay both."

The host, whose only desire was to be paid, resumed his affable air and made haste to reckon up the two accounts. Meanwhile the pretty blonde sank into a chair, holding her handkerchief to her face.

Auguste having paid, Virginie, whose triumph was complete, took his arm and left the inn with him, saying in a mocking tone:

"If we meet the gentleman in the forest, we will send him back to madame."

That fling was the last straw, and Auguste felt amply avenged.

XI

A VISIT TO MONTFERMEIL

Auguste, who had no secrets from the faithful Bertrand, told him of the meeting in Romainville forest.

"Well, lieutenant," said Bertrand, "was Madame Schtrack mistaken when she told me about the little man that slunk upstairs as soon as you left?"

"I thought that Léonie adored me."

"I'm surprised at that, lieutenant; you deceive the ladies so often yourself, that you ought to be a little more suspicious of their oaths."

"On the contrary, my dear Bertrand, I assure you that those who are most cunning in seduction allow themselves to be deceived with astounding ease."

"Then it's no use to be cunning."

"Because you're very fond of a person, that doesn't prove that you know that person thoroughly."

"It is certain that if you knew her thoroughly, you might not be so fond of her; for instance, I love wine, I confess; I always know when it's good, but I can't always tell what province it comes from."

"And I love women, I appreciate their charms, I admire their beauties; but their hearts—Ah! if they exhibited them to the naked eye, the prettiest ones wouldn't always be preferred."

"For all that, lieutenant, if I were you, I'd be a little shy of those affected airs, and those voices always pitched in a falsetto key, which never come from the chest; it seems to me that a person can't be talking honestly when she always acts as if she was singing. I would be on my guard too against fainting fits, tears and stifled sighs."

"Why, my dear Bertrand, when the tears are shed by lovely eyes, when the voice comes from a pretty mouth, when the person who pretends to faint displays a charming body, a shapely figure, is it so easy to resist? No, one must surrender—with liberty to repent later."

"That is true. In fact, that's just like me: to find out whether a wine's good, I must taste it; and it's never the bad one that a man does himself harm with. It's a pity that this meeting didn't happen the day before yesterday, before you paid the note for two thousand francs!"

"Let's not think any more about that!"

"No; only let it be a lesson for the future."

"Bertrand, when you meet Madame Saint-Edmond, I desire you to be as polite to her as before!"

"Oh! never fear, monsieur, I'm a Frenchman, and an old soldier knows the respect due to the sex. Parbleu! if one must needs look askance at everybody who hasn't got the countersign, one would have to look cross-eyed too often. At all events, lieutenant, that makes one less, and we shall be able to straighten out our cash-box a little, and——"

"Oh, yes! I am fully determined to settle down. Des-tival has spoken to me about another excellent investment. I will go to see my notary to-morrow and turn my securities into cash.—Oh! by the way, you will pay a small bill for furniture that will be sent here within a few days."

"Have you been buying furniture, lieutenant?"

"Not for myself, for Virginie."

Bertrand turned away, biting his lips, and struck himself repeated blows on the forehead to keep himself from speaking out and venting his wrath. Auguste, observing his cashier's ill humor, continued with a smile:

"Come, don't get excited, Bertrand! really, you are getting to be so severe!"

"I, monsieur! I haven't said a word!"

"Deuce take it! I am rich; do you expect me to deny myself all pleasure?"

"I don't expect anything at all, monsieur."

"Ought a man in my position to lead the life of a petty tradesman with an income of twelve hundred francs?"

"We spent forty thousand francs last year, and your income only amounts to fifteen thousand; if we go on

that way, we're perfectly certain to be left as naked as little St. John."

"No; I shall succeed in keeping a better proportion between my expenses and my income this year. But this bill is a mere trifle. Poor Virginie! she's so amusing!"

"Oh, yes! she's amusing enough! but she'd ruin a platoon of contractors!"

"You certainly can't call her voice falsetto."

"No, parbleu! there's no doubt about it's coming from her chest; and she must have a strong one too, for she uses it devilish hard. Thunder and guns! what a chatter!"

"She hasn't any prim ways or affected manners."

"Oh! as far as that goes, I'll admit that she's outspoken! She don't conceal her game, at all events. But all the same, lieutenant, you can scold me if you choose, but I tell you again that these women ought not to occupy every minute of a man's time; and that it makes me feel bad to see that they don't love you as you deserve to be loved; because, at heart, you're a good man, you have lots of good qualities and fine feeling; and all that ought to make you see that it isn't by running after women all the time that—That's all, lieutenant."

Auguste was silent for some time, and Bertrand, surprised to see him so pensive, feared that he had offended him, and dared not open his mouth.

"I believe that you're right, Bertrand," said Auguste at last.

"Really, lieutenant—you agree with me?"

"Yes, I feel that a genuine passion, a sincere attachment, must make a man happier than all these momentary fancies. But is it my fault that it is so difficult to find a frank and sincere heart in society?"

"No, certainly not; it isn't your fault."

"Or that coquetry and falsity take the place nowadays of love and friendship?"

"Such substitutes shouldn't be allowed!"

"Ah! my dear Bertrand, we should be too fortunate if all women were faithful."

"True, we should be too fortunate."

"And yet the whole business of living would be intolerably monotonous then."

"Ah! do you think it would injure business?"

"You see, Bertrand, we must take the world as it is."

"We have no help for that."

"But when I have found a woman who will love me for myself, who will be incapable of deceiving me, who will try to please nobody but myself alone, why then——"

"Then, lieutenant?"

"Oh, Bertrand! such a pleasant memory! And it's so long since I thought of her!"

"Who, lieutenant?"

"Lovely Denise, the pretty little milkmaid of Montfermeil. Ah! she is virtuous, I'll swear to that."

"That would be taking a big risk; you hardly know her, and you haven't seen her for two months."

"Do you know why I haven't seen her, Bertrand?"

"Because you forgot her."

"No, it isn't that alone. I have had another reason; you'll laugh, but it is that I am afraid of becoming too fond of that girl."

"In that case, it's very delicate on your part."

"Yes, of course it is; for why should I try to seduce that child, who is virtuous and innocent, and who is living a tranquil life in her village?"

"That would be very wrong, monsieur; there's girls enough willing to be seduced in Paris, without going into the suburbs to look for others."

"Saddle my horse, Bertrand, and saddle the cabriolet horse for yourself; make haste."

"Why, where are we going, monsieur?"

"To Montfermeil, to see Denise."

"What! when you just said——"

"I have reflected that there's no danger for her, because she doesn't love me."

"Do you think not, monsieur?"

"She told me so many times. But I want to see Coco, my little protégé, poor child. I really long to hug the little fellow. You will see how pretty he is, Bertrand—and such vile relations!—Put some money in your pocket, Bertrand."

"Oh! as much as you choose, lieutenant, to relieve the unfortunate, to help an orphan; one never regrets such things, and it gives one a hundred times more pleasure than paying for the brunette's hangings and the blonde's shawls."

The horses were saddled; Auguste and Bertrand mounted, and started for Montfermeil about ten o'clock in the morning. At eleven they had passed Raincy; a little later they reached Livry, turned to the right, and soon saw the village of Montfermeil before them.

Bertrand was drenched with perspiration; he was not used to riding hard, as Dalville was; and although it was September, it was still exceedingly warm. Bertrand drew rein, observing to Auguste that their steeds needed a breathing-space; but, thinking that he recognized the path by which Coco had taken him to his cabin, Auguste urged his horse forward, calling to Bertrand:

"Ride on to the village; I'll join you there."

"All right, I'll go on to the village," said Bertrand to himself, letting his horse walk. "Shall I go to the inn? Or shall I inquire for the little milkmaid? No, I don't

want milk for my horse, and the girl probably wouldn't be able to feed us both.—A very pretty village, but I don't see any signs of an inn."

Bertrand allowed his horse to go where he chose; he passed several hovels of only one story, not caring to halt at such wretched abodes; but he soon found himself beside a rippling stream bordered by willow trees, with a pretty cottage on the opposite side. Bertrand crossed the brook and stopped in front of the yard. A small boy was playing with a goat; a little farther on a girl was churning butter, and at the rear was an elderly woman arranging fruit in a basket.

From his saddle Bertrand could overlook the whole yard, and he watched that rustic picture. Suddenly the girl raised her eyes, saw the horseman, and rushed toward him, exclaiming:

"I can't be mistaken—it's Monsieur Bertrand."

And as she spoke, the girl's eyes searched the road for another horseman.

Bertrand recognized Denise and bestowed an affable nod upon her, saying:

"By the great Turenne, I couldn't have stopped at a better time. Bébelle has a most amazing scent!"

"Pray come in, Monsieur Bertrand," said Denise, her eyes still fixed on the road.

"You're very kind, mamzelle, but I'm looking for an inn, where my horse and I can get something to eat."

"You'll find all you want here. We won't let you go anywhere else, will we, aunt?—Come in, Monsieur Bertrand."

Bertrand could not resist the girl's courteous insistence. He was surprised to hear her call him by name, having no idea that Dalville could have amused himself by mentioning him to Denise. While he dismounted, the

girl ran to her aunt, and, to induce her to treat the new-comer cordially, she made haste to tell her that Bertrand was the companion of the gentleman who had been so kind to Coco. Mère Fourcy rose and made a low reverence to Bertrand, who could not conceive the cause of so much politeness.

Bébelle was taken to the stable, the child left his goat, to go and look at her, and Denise ushered Bertrand into the house and made haste to offer him wine. Meanwhile Mère Fourcy made an omelet, Bertrand having admitted that he would be glad to eat a morsel.

Denise was burning to learn something about the young man who had commended Coco to her care; but she waited for her aunt to leave the room before mentioning him. She did not know how to question Bertrand, whom she supposed to have been sent by the handsome young man to make inquiries about the child; and she waited for Bertrand to speak first; but as he did nothing but eat and drink, Denise decided to question him.

"He sent you to find out whether Coco had everything he wants, and whether I'd made a good use of the money he left with me, didn't he, monsieur?"

Bertrand emptied his glass at a draught and replaced it on the table with a bang, saying:

"For a village wine, that ain't bad at all."

"Didn't you hear what I said, monsieur?" asked Denise timidly.

"I beg pardon, but you will be very good to act as if I hadn't heard, for I didn't understand."

"I asked you if that gentleman, that young man I saw with you, first in a cabriolet, and afterward at Madame Destival's——"

"You mean Monsieur Auguste Dalville?"

"Ah! is his name Auguste Dalville?"

"How is it that you don't know his name and do know mine?"

"Because he called you by name twice before me, in the courtyard, and I haven't forgotten your name."

"You are very kind, mademoiselle."

"So Monsieur Auguste Dalville didn't come with you to-day?"

"I beg pardon, but he's close by! he'll be here very soon."

"He is here, he is coming!" cried Denise, jumping for joy. But she added, to conceal her emotion: "You see, when you came alone, I thought that you wasn't with him any more."

"Do you suppose I'll ever leave my master, my benefactor, a man who has done everything for me, and who still calls me his friend? Ten thousand bayonets! No, my dear child, that can never be; I'm attached to Monsieur Auguste, just as my sword hilt is to the blade; nothing can ever separate me from him, except himself. But I don't worry about that; although I do make bold to scold him a little, he knows old Bertrand's heart."

Denise wiped away the tears of emotion which the old soldier's devotion brought to her eyes; then she cried, taking Bertrand's hand and pressing it in hers:

"Ah! what a fine thing for you to say, Monsieur Bertrand! How nice it is to love a person like that!"

"Does it surprise you? did you think that Monsieur Auguste didn't deserve to be loved so well?"

"I don't say that, monsieur; far from it. Another glass, Monsieur Bertrand?"

"With pleasure, mamzelle."

Denise was delighted to hear him talk of Auguste; and as the wine made him very communicative, he went on; for when he was talking about his benefactor, it was

the same as with his campaigns—there was no way of stopping him.

“Yes, my pretty child, Monsieur Auguste’s a fine fellow—a rake, a lady-killer, fickle and dissipated, it’s true; but those things don’t touch the real man.”

“What, monsieur! he’s all that? Why, it’s very wicked to be a rake and fickle. And you said such fine things about him just now!”

“Have I said any ill of him, my girl? Don’t you know that young men must sow their wild oats? But I trust that with my advice—Corbleu! if Schtrack knew of this wine—And when it’s so hot, it makes you thirsty as the devil.”

“I believe, monsieur, that while Monsieur Auguste was talking to me in Madame Destival’s courtyard, you whispered in my ear: ‘Look out for yourself!’”

“It’s possible, my child, quite possible.—Look you, Mamzelle Denise, you’re a pretty girl——”

“Very polite of you, Monsieur Bertrand.”

“Oh, no! I say that in all honesty. You look to be a good girl, too, and it would be a pity to let you get caught. My master’s a fine fellow, but as soon as he sees a pretty face, he flashes up like powder! it’s too much for him. He’ll swear that it will last forever; but at the first village where he sees another pretty girl, he’ll take fire and swear the same to her.”

“Oh! that’s very wicked!”

“No, it’s a disease of youth, and it will pass away!—You see, in Paris I can’t always be at his heels to warn the pretty girls he makes love to; besides, in the big cities, the girls know enough about such things not to need any warning. But when I happen to see my lieutenant talking to a child who looks to me to be virtuous and respectable, like you, then I just whisper in her ear:

‘Look out for yourself!’ and if that don’t save her, it ain’t my fault, at all events.”

Denise made no reply, for she was reflecting upon what Bertrand had just said; he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, drank, and replied:

“However, the proof that Monsieur Auguste’s a fine young man is that, when he reflects, he don’t make a fool of himself. For instance, he found you to his taste; well, he didn’t come again to see you; he told me that it was for fear of getting to be too fond of you.”

“Too fond of me!” cried Denise. “What! did he really say that, monsieur? Then he loves me.”

“Not at all, my pretty child; that is to say, not any more than the others. But he would have tried to seduce you as a matter of habit, and you might perhaps have listened to him; for he’s a good-looking fellow, and he has such a way of telling of his love that he’d make a woman of sixty believe in it.”

“And that’s why he hasn’t been here?” Denise inquired, with a sigh.

“Yes; but to-day he remembered your saying that you didn’t love him; so then he came.”

“I didn’t say that, Monsieur Bertrand.”

“No? then he did wrong to come.”

“I don’t say that I do love him either.”

“So much the better for you, Mamzelle Denise; for that would be laying up trouble for yourself.”

“Whoever heard of a village girl loving a fine gentleman from the city?”

“I don’t know whether it’s possible, but I know that it sometimes happens.”

“Don’t worry, Monsieur Bertrand, I shall never have any feeling but friendship for Monsieur Auguste; and if it’s the dread of my loving him that keeps him from

coming to the village, why, tell him he can come as often as he likes. Denise knows only too well that she isn't capable of winning the heart of a city gentleman; she won't ever forget it."

"Bravo! that's what I call talking, my dear child. I drink to your virtue,—and, as you see, I leave no heel-taps.—But what's the matter, pray? are you crying?"

"No, Monsieur Bertrand, no; you see, I should be very sorry to—But it's all over now. Monsieur Auguste won't be afraid any more to come to see his little protégé. He won't let two months go by again, without coming."

"Oh! that depends. At Paris, you know, Mamzelle Denise, my master don't have a minute to himself; he's always at some party or some entertainment! People fight to see who shall have him! He gets ten invitations a day."

"Oh, yes! he don't have time to think of the village. Is he so very rich then, your Monsieur Auguste?"

"Rich? Yes, to be sure, he is as yet; but if he keeps on at this rate, he won't be rich long!—Your health, Mamzelle Denise."

"What do you mean by that, Monsieur Bertrand?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing!—At any rate, I ought not to presume to criticise. Monsieur Dalville's money's his own; let him give it to women who deceive him, to grisettes who ruin him; let him pay for furniture and rugs and calico dresses—it's none of my business; I must just obey and pay; but it makes me feel bad because—damnation!—what with women on one side and écarté on the other——"

"What's écarté, Monsieur Bertrand?"

"Oh! that's a little game at which people ruin themselves while they imagine they're enjoying themselves. They say it's a delightful game, because it's played so

fast. For my part, I think it's played much too fast; but Monsieur Auguste gambles so as to do like the others. That's his business. Besides, if he chooses to ruin himself, why, you understand, subordination before everything.—Your health, Mamzelle Denise."

Denise was greatly surprised by what she had heard; she was wondering whether she ought to believe Bertrand, who continued to drink and talk, when Coco came bounding into the room.

"Who is that child?" queried Bertrand.

"The little boy to whom Monsieur Auguste gave so many tokens of his generosity."

"He's a pretty little fellow.—Come here, my boy; get up on my knee—so. Haven't you got any father or mother, little white head?"

"Yes, monsieur, I've got Papa Calleux," Coco replied, looking up at Bertrand.

"What does Papa Calleux do?"

"He works in the fields."

"He's a drunkard," Denise whispered to Bertrand.

"The devil! that's a villainous fault," the latter replied, putting his glass to his lips. "A man must drink—it's a necessity—but he should be able to govern his thirst, and above all things, never lose his wits.—But, by the way, seeing this little fellow reminds me that he's the one my master's gone to see; when he left me, he said: 'I'm going to the child's cabin.'"

"Oh dear! he won't find anybody there," said Denise. "And you never told us! We must go to meet him. I supposed he was at Madame Destival's.—Come, Coco, come; we are going to find your kind friend—the one you love so much."

"The one you talk to me about every day, Denise?" asked the child.

"Yes, your benefactor.—Are you coming with us, Monsieur Bertrand?"

"Faith, Mamzelle Denise, I'm very comfortable here; and if you don't need me——"

"No, no; my aunt will keep you company.—Come, Coco, let's make haste to look for your kind friend."

The child asked nothing better than to go with Denise. They left Bertrand in the act of making a military salute to Mère Fourcy, who had just entered the room, and they started for the cabin.

But Denise was moved by conflicting emotions, of whose source she had no very definite idea: she was happy, and yet she trembled, and her breathing was labored; and as one cannot run far under such circumstances, Denise slackened her pace. But Coco ran on ahead, because at seven years of age such emotions are unknown.

Denise was so engrossed by what Bertrand had said to her, that she did not at first notice that the child had left her; but Coco was well acquainted with the roads, so that the girl was not anxious about him, and she paused a moment under a great tree, glad of an opportunity to prepare for her meeting with the young man. A thousand thoughts passed through her mind; but the one that recurred most frequently was that Auguste had come to the village again solely because he thought that she did not love him.

"Is it quite certain that he thinks that?" said Denise to herself; "perhaps Monsieur Bertrand heard wrong. Is it quite true that Monsieur Auguste is such a deceiver as he says? An old soldier can't know much about all those things. But after all, what difference does it make to me, as I don't care for the young man? As Monsieur Bertrand says, what good would it do me to love him?"

He'd just laugh at me afterward. Oh! there's no danger of my marrying a young man from Paris.—A rake, a seducer, fickle——”

Having reflected thus, the maiden arranged her neckerchief, adjusted her cap, retied her apron, and looked down at herself, murmuring:

“Oh dear! how tumbled I am! If I had known this morning—if I could have guessed. That gentleman won't think me pretty again—Bah! it's all one to me; but a body don't like to look as if she was careless and hadn't any taste.”

At last, having completed her scrutiny of her toilet, Denise was about to leave the tree, when she heard a voice. It was Auguste's. The girl recognized it, and she had to stop again to recover her breath.

But Auguste was not alone; he was talking and laughing with a pretty, rosy-cheeked peasant girl, by whose side he was walking, leading his horse by the rein. Denise being hidden by the great tree, Dalville did not see her.

The peasant halted a hundred yards from the tree which concealed Denise.

“Adieu, monsieur; I'm going this way; and if you're going to Montfermeil, that's your road straight ahead.”

“We shall not part like this, my beauty,” said Auguste, dropping his horse's rein to put his arm about the girl's waist; “we must at least bid each other adieu——”

“Let me go, monsieur, let me go, I say! You squeeze too hard.”

“Not so hard as I would like to.”

“I say, did it take you like this, all of a sudden, when you got off your horse?”

“It always takes me this way.”

"It's worse than a clap of thunder.—Look here! are you going to let me go?"

"When I have kissed you."

"No, none of that.—Look out; while you're getting excited, your nag's going off."

"I can find him again."

"Look, he's already trampling down Nicolas's beans."

"Let him trample."

"Monsieur, I tell you I'll yell if——"

The sound of a kiss interrupted the peasant, and echoed in Denise's heart. She had heard it all, and she did not stir. This first victory would perhaps have been followed by a second, had not Coco's voice made itself heard; he ran toward Auguste, whom he had just caught sight of, shouting at the top of his lungs:

"Here's my kind friend! Good-day, my kind friend! Have you come to play with me?"

When he heard the child's voice, Auguste left the peasant and went to meet him, while she walked away, saying to herself:

"It's mighty lucky the little fellow came, all the same; for it wa'n't no use for me to fight—he kept right on! Jarni! what a scamp he is!"

Auguste took the child in his arms, kissed him, and received his caresses with keen enjoyment.

"You weren't at the house, Coco," he said; "I found nobody there. Don't you live there now?"

"No, I'm with my little Denise all the time now; since Grandma Madeleine died, I've lived with Denise. I'm awful happy now, 'cos she loves me ever so much; she loves me as much as Jacquelineine."

Wiping her eyes, to which the tears had risen, the girl left the great tree and walked toward Auguste, trying to assume a laughing expression.

"Look, there's Denise," said the child, as he spied the little milkmaid coming toward them.

Auguste instantly ran to meet her.

"So here you are, my dear Denise! How glad I am to see you again! It has been so long!—On my word, you are prettier than ever."

Denise curtsied coldly to him, and replied in a constrained tone:

"You are very kind, monsieur."

"Had it not been for business that has kept me in Paris, I should have come to see you long ago. I have wanted to do so more than once, for I have often thought of the little milkmaid of Montfermeil. And you—have you thought of me sometimes?"

"Oh! not often, monsieur," replied Denise, twisting the corner of her apron.

"That is what I call plain speaking," said Auguste testily; but he soon recovered his usual good humor and continued: "After all, Denise, you would have been very foolish to bother about me. Do I deserve to arouse the interest of so pure and sincere a heart as yours? No, I do myself justice. I assure you, Denise, I am very glad for you that you have no affection for me; but I hope to have your friendship, and I will be worthy of it despite my vagaries. What do you say, Denise? You will be my friend, won't you? and when some of the fashionable city ladies have been guilty of fresh perfidy toward me, I will come to you to forget them. The sight of you will reconcile me to your sex; you will make me believe once more in virtue and fidelity, in all the qualities that we seek in women, and—But I haven't kissed you yet, Denise, and a friend has that privilege."

Denise blushing offered her cheek, and Auguste imprinted upon it a single kiss, because the little milkmaid's

cold and constrained manner led him to think that it was only from good-nature that she granted that favor.

"It seems that there have been some important happenings here," continued Auguste. "Coco tells me that he lives with you, that his old grandmother is dead——"

"Yes, monsieur; I asked Père Calleux to let us keep his son, and he consented. I thought Coco would be happier at our house. Did I do wrong, monsieur?"

"As if you could do wrong!"

"And then my little Denise takes good care of Jacqueline," said Coco; "and she lets me play all I want to, —if I'll pray to the good Lord for my kind friend every morning and every night."

Denise blushed and looked at the ground.

"Isn't it natural to pray for one's benefactor?" she stammered.

Auguste was touched; he gazed at the girl and the child for some moments, profoundly amazed that a little money, given for the purpose of doing good, should afford him greater happiness than the money he spent by the handful to pay for his pleasures. Then, as if he were ashamed of his emotion, he exclaimed:

"Thanks for a mere trifle!—But, now that my little fellow is with you for good and all, I don't propose that he shall be a burden to you. You can hardly have anything left of the paltry sum I gave you, and to-day I will make up for my neglect. I want Coco to do something, to learn——"

"Oh! Denise is teaching me my letters now," said the child.

"What! do you know how to read, Denise?" asked Auguste.

"Yes, monsieur, and to write too," the girl replied, with an air of importance.

"Upon my word, that is very fine for a milkmaid," said Auguste with a smile, "and I am sure that you know more than any of your companions. In that case I will leave Coco's education in your hands for a few years. Later, we will see—I will have him come to Paris——"

"And Jacqueleine, too, can't she, my kind friend?" said the boy, taking Auguste's hand.

"Yes, my boy.—But I am forgetting poor Bertrand, who is waiting for me in some village wine-shop."

"He's at our house, monsieur; I left him with my aunt."

"Let us go and join him then, for I will confess, my dear Denise, that I am dying of hunger and thirst."

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, and I never thought of asking you. Come along; we shall soon be there."

They set out for the village. Auguste offered the maid his arm, which she accepted with a blush, hardly daring to lean upon her escort, lest the slightest pressure of her arm should lead him to guess what she would have liked to hide from herself; and even holding her breath, because she was afraid that anything might betray her. Blessed age! blessed age of innocence, when love retains all its modesty, when she whom love assails, while striving to conceal it, allows it to appear in her eyes, in her voice, in her slightest acts! It would unquestionably have been very easy to read the girl's heart at that moment; but is it possible for a man accustomed to the manœuvres of city coquettes to recognize true love?

They reached the cottage and found Mère Fourcy sitting beside Bertrand and listening with eyes as big as saucers to the tales of battle which the ex-corporal watered with the native wine. Denise's aunt curtsied again and again to the gentleman from Paris; Denise ran hither and thither, turning everything topsy-turvy

in order to give Auguste a dainty luncheon at once; and while she was making it ready, Coco led his kind friend to see Jacqueline, and Mère Fourcy followed, to call the visitor's attention to the beauty of her roosters, the size of her eggs, and the gentleness of her cows. After inspecting the cottage, Auguste went into the garden, still under the guidance of Mère Fourcy and Coco; they gave him grapes and other fruit to eat, and presented him with the finest flowers. Auguste expressed great admiration for everything, and each of his encomiums procured for him an additional reverence.

At last the repast was served. It was one o'clock, the universal dinner hour in the village. Denise had worked to such purpose that she was able to offer Auguste a full meal. There were chickens, ducks and rabbits. When he saw the bountifully-laden table, Auguste insisted that his hosts should sit down with him. The villagers made some demur, but the young man declared that he would accept nothing unless they bore him company. They submitted, with renewed curtsies; Auguste took his seat between Denise and his little protégé, with Mère Fourcy opposite; and at his lieutenant's invitation, Bertrand seated himself beside the aunt.

The meal, enlivened by Auguste's sallies, Bertrand's bumpers, and the child's artless joy, aroused an unfamiliar sentiment in each of those who partook of it. Mère Fourcy, bursting with pride at the idea of dining with such a fine gentleman, sat a foot away from the table, and did not lift her glass without saluting the company. Bertrand was deeply gratified to sit at table with his lieutenant; and, desirous to prove that he was ever mindful of the respect he owed him, he maintained while eating the attitude with which he would present arms; he did not lift his eyes from his plate, even to fill

his neighbor's glass, the result being that he sometimes missed it. The child laughed and chattered, played with Auguste, and fed his goat. Denise spoke very little; she was embarrassed and did not eat, and yet she was conscious of being very happy, seated beside the hare-brained youth who kissed every girl he saw, and who had the secret of winning the love even of those to whom he did not make love.

Auguste had never been in such high spirits as at that meal: he caressed the child, he joked with Mère Fourcy, he forced Bertrand to drink with him; it seemed to him that the fresh, pure air of the fields set him free from all the trammels of society, and that he breathed more freely, happy to be rid for a moment of etiquette and gallantry.

"Bertrand," said the young man, filling his glass; "I really believe that I am happier here than at a sumptuously-laden table, surrounded by pretty women covered with jewels, and served by an army of footmen."

"Here, monsieur, you see nobody but people who care for you, and who will not ruin you by compliments and courtesies."

"Well, Bertrand, when the others have ruined me, this is where I will come to seek consolation for the ingratitude of men and the perfidy of women. But you say nothing, Denise; does that mean that you don't approve of my plan?"

"No, monsieur," the girl replied under her breath; and her aunt exclaimed:

"Come, speak up, my child; you don't eat and you don't talk! Something's the matter, sure."

"It's a fact," said Auguste, "that you don't seem to share our merriment. What is the matter, Denise?"

"The matter, monsieur? Why, nothing, I give you my word."

"And I give you my word that something is the matter!" cried Mère Fourcy. "Pardi! for some time she's been all turned round; she don't like dancing, she don't like games, she don't know what she does like. But I know all about it, I tell you; when a girl gets to be like that, it means that she's thinking about something.—Well, you needn't blush for that, my child; you're a good girl, as everyone knows; but that don't keep you from thinking about getting married, and I hope monsieur'll do us the honor to come to the wedding."

"Yes, most assuredly," said Auguste, with a slight grimace; "yes, Denise, I shall be delighted to be a witness of your happiness; and as you love someone—You didn't tell me that you had made your choice."

Denise made no reply; she kept her eyes on her plate, and tried to conceal her confusion by caressing Coco's faithful companion.

Auguste rose abruptly from the table, and, without a word to the others, left the room in evident ill humor, and went out to walk in the garden. He did not choose to admit to himself the nature of his feelings; but what Mère Fourcy said had caused him a pang. Even while he told himself again and again that he cared nothing for Denise, he felt in his heart that the young peasant's face aroused in him a sweeter emotion than those of all the coquettes in Paris.

He walked about at random through the winding paths, and did his utmost to recover his merry humor.

"I can't understand myself," he thought; "losing my temper because that girl loves someone, and that someone is not I! I! Why on earth should she love me, whom she has seen but three times, and of whom she knows nothing? I must have a deal of self-love to dream that she could care for me. But no, I feel that it is not

vanity that makes me wish that she should.—Well, I must return to Paris and forget this little milkmaid. That will be easy enough; for what is there so extraordinary about her? There are a thousand women in Paris prettier, more alluring, more——”

Auguste stopped short, for, happening to turn his head, he saw Denise within a few yards. He fixed his eyes on the girl, who seemed afraid to go forward and stood beside a tree. Her confusion, her flushed face, the furtive glances that she cast at the young man, gave to her whole person a grace and charm which art could not imitate; and Auguste said under his breath: “No, there’s not a woman in Paris to be compared with her.”

Surprised to see their guest leave the table so abruptly, Denise had followed him at a distance. She remembered what Bertrand had told her, and as she desired nothing so much as that Auguste should come often to the village, she determined carefully to conceal her secret sentiments.

Auguste walked toward her; for some time they stood face to face, without speaking; at last the young man said, trying to assume an indifferent manner:

“So you love someone, Denise?”

“Yes, monsieur,” the girl replied, blushing and keeping her eyes on the ground.

“If I remember rightly, when I first met you, in the little path in the woods, you told me that you had no lover.”

“That was true, monsieur.”

“Then you have given your heart away since that time?”

Denise sighed and held her peace.

“I have no right to question you,” continued Auguste sharply; “but it is the interest you arouse in me, the—

Do you know, Denise, I was sadly mistaken, for I thought that you loved me a little."

"Oh, no! I don't love you, monsieur—not with love. I must tell you that, as you wouldn't come to the village any more if it wasn't so. But I do hope you'll come, monsieur; oh, yes! you must come to see the child you've adopted! I shan't forget that I'm only a peasant and you're a gentleman from the city; and I assure you that I shall never love you."

As she finished, the girl turned away so that Auguste could not see the tears that fell from her eyes. But he was already far away, striding toward the house. He entered the living-room and said:

"Come, Bertrand, we must return to Paris."

"Return to Paris it is, lieutenant; I'm all ready to do four leagues an hour. Adieu, mamma; your wine's very nice. Some day when Schtrack has the time, I'll bring him down here to reconnoitre."

The girl entered the room and tried to read Auguste's eyes; but he said to her without looking at her:

"Adieu, Denise, we're off."

"Already!" cried Denise; "you seemed to be so comfortable here!"

"Yes, I am very comfortable here; that is true; but business calls me back. I will see you again, Denise; I will come again to see you."

"You won't let so long a time go by without coming to see Coco?"

"No, I promise you that. Take this—it's for him. I have no need to commend him to you, you are so kind!"

"Oh! as to that, monsieur, she loves the child as if he was her brother."

"But what is the use of leaving me so much money, monsieur?"

"His house is falling to pieces; you must have it repaired; then have the little garden behind it enclosed, and buy the whole place for my little boy."

"But, monsieur, this is three thousand francs that you've given me, and it won't take so much money for that."

"Take it, I insist; and if it isn't enough,—here is my address in Paris. Write me, Denise, and you shall hear from me at once."

Auguste tossed his card on the table, and kissed the child.

"Good-bye, my kind friend!" said the little fellow, throwing his arms about Auguste's neck. Mère Fourcy made the young man a curtsy, which lasted as long as it took to count the three thousand francs. Denise glanced at him with an embarrassed air, expecting that he would kiss her; but he did nothing of the sort. After bidding the child adieu, he bowed to the others, sprang lightly to his saddle, and rode away with Bertrand, leaving the girl greatly depressed by the cold manner in which he had left her.

"What does it mean?" she said to herself; "he stayed away because he was afraid he'd fall in love with me, and now he acts as if he didn't like it because he knows I'm not in love with him. What should I do, so that I can see him often?"

As he trotted along beside his lieutenant, Bertrand, as his custom was, ventured to indulge in a few observations.

"It's a fine thing to be generous, certainly, and we shouldn't regret the money we give to do good. Still, monsieur, it seems to me that three thousand francs is a good deal just at this time when our cash-box isn't very well supplied; you might have embarrassed yourself less

by giving it in several instalments, and it would have amounted to the same thing."

"I probably shall not come to the village again for a long while," said Auguste pensively.

"Oh! that makes a difference, and I am wrong."

XII

INVESTMENTS AND INNOCENT GAMES.—THE PUNCH AND THE LAMP-POST

On his return to Paris, Auguste found Monsieur Destival waiting for him at his rooms. The business agent shook hands effusively with his dear friend.

"Dear Dalville, where in the deuce have you been?" said Destival, casting a glance out of the window, into the street, from time to time.

"You have been waiting for me—I am very sorry."

"Oh! there's no harm done. To be sure, I have a thousand and one places to go to; but my new horse is splendid. By George! he's an invaluable beast! Did you notice him at the door?"

"No, I didn't pay any attention."

"I have had my cabriolet repainted, and I have hired a negro groom. One must needs increase his household when his business is increasing. I have presented my wife with a cook, a *cordon-bleu*; you will have a chance to judge of her talent, for I want you to come to dinner to-morrow. There will be a few other people, all very rich. Not that I care for that; I am not like La Thomassinière, who is always dinning his fortune and his houses into your ears! It's all the more ridiculous

to one who, like myself, knows about our dear speculator's origin; for to such a one his pretensions are simply laughable.—Did you notice my negro below?"

"No, I didn't notice."

"He's a well-built fellow, of magnificent color. I prefer a single negro to a lot of long-legged varlets who ruin a carriage.—By the way, my wife has a bone to pick with you, my friend; she says that you are neglecting her."

"But I assure you——"

"Oh! you never come to the house now! That is not kind! No more music, no more singing, no more theatre parties; you have deserted us, Dalville, and yet you must know that we are your true friends. But let's talk business a little. I have had your interests in mind; for although I don't see you, I think of you none the less."

"You are too kind!"

"You are a heedless fellow, and you don't think about making money. But I am not, like La Thomassinière, one of those selfish men who think of nobody but themselves. I find an opportunity to get a handsome return for my funds, but I say to myself: 'Why shouldn't I take my dear friend Dalville into this affair? Why enrich myself alone? A friend's happiness doubles our own.' And then I am not ambitious, I have no desire to throw dust in people's eyes and put on airs, like certain acquaintances of ours. I want to make myself comfortable, that's all. In a word, the matter that I spoke to you about some time ago can be carried through; I will guarantee a certain profit; but I must have funds."

"I can raise two hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"That's enough; with what I have we can go ahead. In less than a year I propose that that amount shall bring you in twenty-five thousand. Not so bad, eh?"

"I trust to your prudence; I understand very little about business, but I should not want to risk my fortune."

"Oh! never fear, my friend; when it comes to prudence, I am a regular serpent! Besides, what about myself? do you suppose that I mean to risk my own money?—When will you be able to obtain the cash?"

"To-morrow."

"Bring it when you come to dinner."

"Certainly."

"That's settled; the receipt will be all ready, for everything must be done in due form.—My dear fellow, you are growing fat; you look delightfully well."

"Do you think so? The fact is that I feel a little tired to-day."

"Faith, it doesn't show. You're a hearty buck! How old are you? Not more than twenty-two, surely?"

"Almost twenty-seven."

"That is most extraordinary!—But I must leave you; I have so much business on hand. I must go to see Monin; I have sold his drug shop for him. I am going to ask him to dinner, and his wife too. They are not very brilliant, especially poor Monin himself, who allows his wife to lead him about like a baby; but he's honest, yes, he's probity itself; and I demand that, yes, I demand that above all things.—Until to-morrow then, my dear fellow, and don't forget the money."

"That is understood."

Destival left Auguste after shaking hands with him again, as if he had a convulsion. In the reception room the business agent met Bertrand. New salutations to the ex-corporal, with whom he also shook hands, saying:

"The excellent and worthy Bertrand! I am so glad to meet you! How's the health, old fellow? still robust? As well set up as ever, I see! What a fine thing it is to

have been a soldier! But I assure you that that one lesson you gave me did me a deal of good! I hope that one of these days you will be willing to give me another, my good fellow, and I shall always be proud to receive them.—Au revoir, excellent Bertrand!”

And without giving Bertrand time to say a word in reply, Monsieur Destival rushed through the door and down the stairs; and shouted at the top of his voice before he reached the foot of the last flight:

“Domingo! Holà, Domingo! my negro! open the door for me!”

A short, thick-set negro, wearing a red jacket, and a little jockey cap with a ten-inch visor, came forward, walking with difficulty in a pair of doeskin trousers which Monsieur Destival had worn ten years, and which he had thought it best to resign to his groom, for whom they were much too small; assuring him that they would be as much too large before he had been two years in his service.

When his negro appeared, Destival looked to the right hand and to the left, to see if he were observed; but as no one stopped to look at Domingo, the business agent concluded to enter his cabriolet; and having assured himself by looking through the little window, that the negro was behind, Monsieur Destival lashed his horse, and shouted “look out!” even when nobody was in danger.

“You won’t have any further occasion to scold me, my dear Bertrand,” said Auguste to the ex-corporal, after Monsieur Destival had gone.

“Why not, lieutenant?”

“Because I am about putting my affairs in order. I am going to entrust my money to Destival, who will invest it to such good advantage that in a short time I shall be as rich as I was before.”

"You are going to turn over your money to that gentleman, who is so polite?"

"Yes, my friend."

"All of it?"

"Why, almost all; I am going to give him two hundred and fifty thousand francs; that will leave me about twenty thousand francs to live on and enjoy myself, until I settle with him, which I don't expect to do for some time."

"That is all very well, monsieur, but have you got any security? For two hundred and fifty thousand francs is quite a little sum, you know! and when it's all you have——"

"Don't be alarmed; I shall have all possible security. Besides, Destival is a shrewd, prudent man. I have more confidence in him than in La Thomassinière, who is much richer, however; and then, when I want my money, I shall only have to give him three months' notice."

"But suppose he meant to keep it, would he give you notice, lieutenant?"

"For shame! must we look upon everybody as a knave and sharper, Bertrand?"

"God forbid, lieutenant, for in that case we should have to keep up a continual fire on everybody we met."

"In truth, I have no reason to complain of my lot: I enjoy life, I deny myself nothing, and my fortune will soon be increased. If a coquette does deceive me now and then, I pay her back in her own coin. But I am angry with that little Denise; I feel that I should have loved her so dearly! The idea of her giving her heart away without telling me!"

"Did she require your permission, lieutenant?"

"No, but if I had fallen in love with her, if I had formed the hope of winning her love—You must agree,

Bertrand, that it is most unpleasant for a young man who has some good qualities to think that such a pretty girl prefers some clodhopper, some lubberly peasant to him!"

"That clodhopper, that peasant, will offer her his hand, monsieur, and make her his wife; he will love in her the mother of his children, and will never leave her. Don't you suppose that those things weigh more in the scales than the glances and sighs and pretty speeches of the young man from Paris?"

"You are right, Bertrand; sometimes I have no common sense. Let us say no more about Denise. I will go to see her when she's married; but until then I don't propose to go to Montfermeil again; the girl is too enticing."

"Bravo! that is acting like an honorable man, lieutenant."

Auguste started for his notary's; as he went downstairs he met Madame Saint-Edmond for the first time since the adventure at the Tournebride.

At sight of Auguste, Léonie stopped, leaned against the wall, turned her head away, drew her handkerchief, and omitted nothing calculated to give the impression that she was about to faint; but Auguste, paying no heed to his neighbor's expressive pantomime, contented himself with a low bow, and passed without stopping.

The notary handed Dalville the funds which he had in his hands belonging to him. Auguste put two hundred and fifty thousand francs in his wallet, and left the balance with Bertrand, urging him to be less economical in his expenditure, because, as their fortune was about to be doubled, he did not see why they should deny themselves anything. The next afternoon, at five, Auguste took his wallet and went to Destival's house, bidding Bertrand enjoy himself while he was away. To obey his

master, the ex-corporal went in search of his friend Schtrack, with whom he proposed to take a short promenade.

The business agent had taken larger apartments than those he formerly occupied. He had mounted his household with more splendor, and although he could not as yet rival Monsieur de la Thomassinière in magnificence, it was plain that he was doing all that he could to approach him. As a general rule, however, the pains that one takes to deceive the eyes do not have the hoped-for result, and serve only to arouse mockery. One rarely succeeds in art by departing from one's specialty; and in the world he who tries to make himself out what he is not, is a laughing-stock. In vain does the grisette, beneath her big bonnet, strive to copy the simpers of a lady in society; in vain does the tailor's apprentice, newly-clad from head to foot, believe that, because he is dressed in the latest fashion, he has the air and aspect of a stock-broker. The natural characteristics always show through; one may impose on the multitude, and amid the multitude pass for what one is not; but at the slightest examination,

"The mask falls, the man remains,
The hero vanishes."

Thus we find in the world a great many people who would be most estimable and would not arouse criticism, if they did not try to do more than they are able to do. An under clerk, with a salary of a hundred louis, must needs give evening parties, balls; the house is turned topsy-turvy; beds are taken down to make more room, a piano is hired, and lamps of all kinds; decanters of syrups are prepared, and punch, and there is a supper. But, despite all the trouble he has taken, the company, much too numerous for the tiny apartments, cannot

find room. There are not enough chairs; the paper behind the beds is of a different color and betrays the moving in the morning; the piano is out of tune; the refreshments, bought all made, are not sweet enough, because the sugar has been used sparingly in order to make another decanter of syrup; the lamps refuse to burn, because the host is not familiar with them; the punch is compounded of poor brandy, because they bought the cheapest brand; and at supper you will find nothing but stale bread to eat with the fowl that is handed you. People love to criticise; you laugh quietly at everything that is bad, entirely oblivious to what is all right. Now, is it not much better to give, instead of this, an unpretentious party, to have fewer guests, and to leave the bed in place; to have one less cold joint, and to serve fresh bread; in short, to put aside the ambition to have a grand reception, and aim at nothing more than getting a few friends together?

At Monsieur Destival's the beds were not taken down because they had a salon large enough to hold a numerous company; the lamps burned well, because they were frequently used; and the punch was good, because Madame Destival knew nothing of that false economy by virtue of which nothing is ever done well. But Domingo, stationed in the reception room to announce the guests, and Baptiste, who ran constantly from one room to another to execute his masters's orders, and who commented aloud on everything that he was told to do, produced an irresistibly comical effect, largely because Destival was incessantly calling one or the other of them by the epithets of "knave" and "rascal."

When Dalville arrived he found several persons in the salon; he recognized Monsieur Monin and his better half, the latter of whom did not wear a shepherdess's hat on

this occasion, but a huge turban beneath which her fat face strikingly resembled a Turk's. Auguste had hardly entered the salon when Monin inquired concerning the state of his health. Madame Destival accorded him a most gracious welcome, and her reproaches for the infrequency of his visits were uttered in such an amiable tone that they could not fail to make him regret that he had earned them.

Before Auguste had looked at the other guests, Monsieur Destival entered the salon, and at sight of Dalville uttered a joyful cry as if he had thought him dead; then he ran to him and grasped his hands, saying:

"Here is our dear friend; it is really he! he has not failed us! How kind of him! You see, it is a great favor to have him here! He has so many acquaintances, so many invitations! he can hardly keep track of them all. —Have you thought about our little investment?" he added in an undertone.

"I have the money with me," said Auguste.

"In that case, let us step into my study and fix it up before dinner, so that we need think of nothing but enjoying ourselves."

"Very well."

"A million pardons, mesdames, for taking our dear Dalville away from you; I promise to restore him to you in five minutes; otherwise I imagine that you would hate me mortally."

As he spoke, Destival led Auguste into his study, where the younger man produced his wallet. Having counted the notes, the business agent locked them up in his desk and gave Auguste a receipt for the amount, which Auguste put in his pocket.

"That's all right," he said; "I will examine this when I am at home."

Then the gentlemen returned to the salon, Dalville eager to make the acquaintance of two or three attractive women of whom he had caught a glimpse, and Destival as radiant as if he had just discovered a diamond mine.

The company was increased by several persons among whom Auguste noticed three sisters, young and pretty, whose manners and speech and smiles, however, were never free from affectation; a very merry and talkative young woman, ready to joke with everybody, but especially with the gentlemen; a silly little creature of sixteen, very shy and awkward, who dared not leave her mamma's chair or look at the persons to whom she spoke. A tall man with spectacles, who ran his nose against the paintings, engravings, screens and decanters, persisted in handling and examining everything, shaking his head and emitting an occasional *hum! hum!* doubtless fraught with meaning; while a short man, embarrassed by his huge paunch, his short arms, and his small head, not knowing what to do with himself, stood first on one leg, then on the other, played with his watch chain, stuck out his tongue when anybody looked at him, and scratched his nose when nobody was looking.

Generally speaking, the female portion of the company seemed more select than the male portion; but a business agent has to do with all classes, and it frequently happens that it is not the most fashionably dressed men through whom the most money is to be made.

Monin remained almost all the time behind his wife's chair, leaving his station only to inquire for somebody's health; and, when he had put his question to some new arrival, he would return with a smile on his face, open his snuff-box, and offer it to *Bichette*, who, despite her turban, emulated her husband in the size of her pinch.

The clock struck six, and Domingo came writhing into the room, and said in a jargon composed of all known languages :

“ Master, soup served.”

And Monin, who had not noticed the negro in the reception room, and who supposed that he was a trader from the coast of Guinea, who was invited to dinner, was about to leave his wife's chair to ask him how his health was, when Bichette, divining her husband's purpose, caught him by his coat, saying :

“ Where on earth are you going, Monsieur Monin? Stay where you are! Don't you see that that's Monsieur Destival's negro?”

“ What! is that a negro, Bichette?”

“ Do you mean to say that you can't see it for yourself?”

“ Yes, of course; but I'll tell you—I thought he was talking German. ‘ Soup served,’ he said.”

“ Well, monsieur, is that German, I'd like to know? Still, when a person makes so much talk about having a negro, he ought to teach him to walk. Do you suppose I'd have a groom that acted as if he had lead in his breeches? A sweet creature, their Domingo! He's some wretched savage who's been soaked in licorice juice to make a negro of him.”

“ Dinner is served, and Monsieur and Madame de la Thomassinière have not come!” said Madame Destival, snappishly.

“ We are only waiting for them. They are terrible people—never on time! It's after six.”

“ Six ten,” said the tall man in spectacles. “ I am always with the sun; hum! hum!”

“ Six seven,” said Monin, consulting his watch.

“ You are slow, monsieur; hum! hum!”

"My husband sets his watch every day by the cannon at the Palais-Royal," said Madame Monin, with a disdainful glance at the spectacled man; while the little man with short arms stood thrice on his right leg and twice on his left, in his struggles to draw his watch from his fob; and, having finally succeeded in producing a silver time-piece, to which a gold chain was attached, he gazed a long time at the dial and said:

"Yes, it must be about that."

"Faith," said Destival, "if La Thomassinière weren't going to bring his wife, we wouldn't wait any longer, for it's ridiculous to keep a whole large party waiting like this; but a pretty woman always has some additional touch to give her costume, and we must always forgive the Graces.—Domingo, see that the entrées are kept warm. Baptiste, have the chafing dishes red hot. Come, you knaves, move a little more quickly when I give an order!"

Domingo did not move any more quickly, because the doeskin breeches made it impossible. Baptiste, always in ill humor, pushed the negro roughly, muttering:

"Well, you darkie! A pretty sort of assistant to give me! He can't do anything but break dishes and steal liquor! I wish he'd drink so much that he'd smash the whole crockery closet! That would teach 'em to give a brand new red jacket to that miserable black fellow, when they've made me wear the same shabby coat for three years."

The half hour struck and the guests' faces lengthened. Auguste talked with one of his neighbors, who said:

"Don't you think, monsieur, that it's absurd that one or two people should keep a whole party waiting, and that decent people should be at the mercy of a fellow who doesn't choose to be prompt? At my house, monsieur,

we dine at a fixed hour; I never wait two minutes for the people I invite, and they are always prompt, I assure you, for they know we should dine without them."

Auguste agreed that his neighbor was right. Madame Destival lost patience; monsieur kept running to the dining-room and back, crying:

"Everything will be cold! The little pâtés won't be eatable! It's exceedingly unpleasant!"

"Yes," said the man with the spectacles, "warmed-over pastry is good for nothing, hum! hum! because it's good only when it's just out of the oven, hum!"

Monin seemed profoundly affected by what was said about the little pâtés, and the uneasy gentleman scratched his nose with a piteous expression. At last, about seven o'clock, there was a violent ring and Monsieur and Madame de la Thomassinière soon entered the salon.

Athalie was resplendent; her costume was magnificent; her neck and arms were covered with diamonds and their dazzling reflection was in perfect harmony with the piquant expression of her features. At sight of her, the men uttered involuntary murmurs of admiration; the women said nothing, but scrutinized her costume, even to the tiniest details, and their eyes were unable to dissemble a gleam of jealousy, because everything was unexceptionable and there was nothing to criticise. Now criticism is a source of the greatest pleasure in society, where people do not spare even their friends! Fancy what they say of others!

La Thomassinière, who had made twenty thousand francs that very morning on a piece of land which he had resold, and who had the Marquis de Cligneval at his table almost every day, had assumed a more supercilious air than ever. He puffed himself out until his coat and his cravat were too tight for him, dragged his feet when he

walked, and swayed his body like a pendulum. As he entered the salon he cast insolent glances upon all the guests, bowed to nobody, trod upon feet and dresses without apologizing, and did not answer Monin when he quitted his post behind Bichette's chair to ask the speculator:

"How's the state of your health?"

"How cruel of you to keep us waiting, my dear La Thomassinière!" said Monsieur Destival, offering his hand to the parvenu, who patronizingly gave him two fingers to shake, saying:

"Yes, that is true. But what can I do, when I haven't a moment to myself? We nearly missed coming. My friend the marquis wanted to take us into the country; but I thought that it would incommode you if we didn't come, so I said: 'Let's go.' But it was a close shave, on my word!"

During this conversation, Monin had remained behind La Thomassinière. Obtaining no reply, he decided to return to his wife; but Bichette, who saw everything that took place in every corner of the salon, had noticed that La Thomassinière did not acknowledge her husband's salutation, and she glared fiercely at the parvenu, as she said to Monin:

"Why did you go to speak to that uncivil fellow?"

"Bichette, I——"

"Why do you need to inquire for everybody's health?"

"Because, Bichette——"

"Are you a friend of those people?"

"You know perfectly well that we met them at Monsieur Destival's. Will you have a pinch, Bichette?"

"Didn't you notice that the insolent wretch, the pitiful creature, who makes such a ridiculous splurge, turned his back on you without acknowledging your greeting?"

"Perhaps he didn't see me, Bichette."

"Not see you! You were right under his nose! You're a chicken-hearted creature, Monsieur Monin! Those Thomassinières shall pay me for this. Meanwhile, let me see you speaking to that man or his wife, and I'll take away your snuff-box for a week."

Monin, terrified by that threat, retreated behind the chair and took three pinches in rapid succession. But Domingo announced again that dinner was served, and they all repaired to the dining-room. Dalville offered his hand to the hostess, a provincial dandy escorted the gorgeous Athalie, the spectacled gentleman went to the three sisters, saying that he would take charge of the Graces, La Thomassinière went out alone, considering doubtless that his own presence was honor enough, Monin walked at a snail's pace with an old dowager, and Madame Monin alone was left in the salon with Monsieur Bisbis—the little man who shifted from one leg to the other;—he skipped forward to the stout lady in the turban, offered her his right hand, then the left, then the right again, until Madame Monin, out of patience, seized her escort about the waist, as if she were going to dance a waltz, and pulled him into the dining-room.

Dalville occupied one of the places of honor beside the hostess, and on his other side was the young lady who talked so easily. Athalie was between the provincial beau and the gentleman with spectacles; her husband was between an old lady and one of the three sisters. Madame Monin had her escort for her neighbor, and Monsieur Monin found himself seated beside the silly school-girl, who dared not raise her eyes, and to whom he had twice offered snuff when the soup was served.

The dinner was a magnificent affair: three courses, four entrées to each. Monin had no time to visit his

snuff-box; he had not gone beyond the anchovies, when the first course disappeared. La Thomassinière found an opportunity to say that the madeira was poor, that the olives were too salt, that the butter was not so good as that made on his country place at Fleury, and that two servants were not enough to serve twenty people. To be sure, he was often obliged to ask twice for a dish, because Domingo never came quickly enough, and Baptiste got confused and lost his head running around the table.

During the second course Baptiste dropped a dish of macaroni on Madame Monin, and Domingo broke a pile of plates because he tried to run. Madame Monin shrieked because her dress of Naples silk was spotted, and Madame Destival tried to pacify her. Monsieur Destival scolded his servants, and Monin dared not fill his glass again because Bichette was in a rage.

Although he drank freely of all the wines, La Thomassinière kept repeating that he had much better ones in his cellar. Destival made wry faces at his wife, who was bright enough to pretend to pay no attention to the parvenu's absurd talk. Athalie seemed to be bored by the insipid remarks of her neighbors; Madame Monin was apparently attempting the conquest of Monsieur Bisbis, who fidgeted on his chair, uncertain how to eat the charlotte russe, which he finally decided to attack with his fork. Monin longingly eyed the Roman punch, which he feared would never reach him, and he said twice to Baptiste:

"I say—er—servant, give me some of that dish they're passing over there."

But Baptiste, still in ill humor, walked away, muttering between his teeth:

"I've got something else to do. How all these people eat! There won't be anything left for us!"

Monin, his appeal being disregarded by Baptiste, decided to apply to Domingo, to whom he gave his plate, saying:

"Negro, just ask for a little of that shiny stuff for—for a person."

Domingo presented the plate to Monsieur Destival, who was serving the Roman punch.

"A little shiny stuff," he said, "for little man with big nose."

Everybody laughed, Madame Monin alone taking it very ill that the negro should presume so to designate her husband; and she vented her wrath on a third dish of cream, saying to Monsieur Bisbis:

"I'd rather be served by four chimney-sweeps than a negro."

After the coffee and the liqueurs, they left the table in about as hilarious a mood as when they sat down; that is to say, everyone was bored, as is usually the case at a formal dinner. But the people invited for the evening were already coming in crowds; and Destival was enchanted, because there was hardly room to move, and everyone exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! what a crowd! how hot it is here!"

The card tables were set out, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière took his seat at an *écarté* table, tossing his purse on the table, saying: "I play for nothing but gold."

But the young people—that is to say, the young ladies and some few men who were sensible enough to prefer their conversation to a game of cards—took refuge in Madame Destival's bedroom. Athalie also went thither, as did Dalville and other young men. They decided that cards should be barred out, and, in order to do something, someone proposed playing games.

The suggestion was accepted, and they seated themselves in a circle. Madame Monin eagerly joined them and wanted to begin with "In my hole, in the common hole, and in my neighbor's hole!" which she described to the others by pointing her forefinger, with much dexterity, to the right and left and centre of the assemblage; but, despite the neat way in which Madame Monin put her finger in her neighbor's hole, the game was voted down, in favor of *crambo*, which requires the imposing of forfeits; although Madame Monin declared that it was too easy, and that her head was full of rhymes. But she ran short on the second round, because the others had said everything that she knew; so she looked at Monsieur Bisbis, and said:

"Give me one."

"I'm trying to think of one for myself," whispered Monsieur Bisbis.

They soon tired of *crambo*, and a young lady having proposed blind-man's-buff seated, the gentlemen voted unanimously in favor of that game. The little school-girl began; she recognized the third person in whose lap she sat—her young cousin, who had come after dinner. After him came the turn of the tall man with spectacles, who seated himself cautiously on the ladies' laps, saying:

"Hum! hum! I'll bet I can guess. Hum! hum! I know who it is. *Parbleu!* if I could use my hands it would be too easy."

However, he sat down upon the whole party without guessing; luckily Madame Monin remained and she was readily recognizable. Enchanted to have been caught, Madame Monin allowed herself to be bandaged, and hurled herself recklessly at the circle. At the first onslaught her weight crushed a young dandy, who cried:

"Name me, madame, name me, I beg you!"

"One moment, monsieur; you're in a terrible hurry," said Madame Monin, trying to find something by which to recognize him.

"Get off me, madame, I can't stand it any longer!" cried the young man, turning purple.

"It seems to me, monsieur, that you're not so much to be pitied, having me on your knees."

"I am suffocating, madame."

The buxom dame persisted; but as everybody dreaded to receive her on his knees, it was proposed to draw forfeits at once, despite the remonstrances of Madame Monin, who was determined to sit on Monsieur Bisbis's lap, although he swore that he had nothing to identify him.

One of the three sisters had the forfeits wrapped in the skirt of her dress. A young officer put in his hand to draw, and spent a very long time mixing them up, so that there should be no cheating. Athalie directed operations. She told the young officer to draw; but he evidently had some difficulty in getting hold, for he was a long time deciding to remove his hand from its hiding-place in the folds of the young lady's dress. At last the forfeit was brought forth; it belonged to the school-girl, and she was told to tell somebody something in confidence. She hesitated, uncertain to whom she should turn, or rather because she was afraid to select her little cousin, at whom she glanced furtively, with a blush. But her mamma was there, so she chose Monsieur Monin for her confidant.

Monin, who had slipped behind his wife's chair, was amazed when the girl said to him:

"Will you come with me, monsieur?"

The ex-druggist did not know what to do, so he leaned over his better half and whispered:

"Shall I go with her, Bichette?"

"Greatly to be pitied, aren't you, for being chosen to receive a young lady's confidence!" rejoined Madame Monin, smiling at Monsieur Bisbis.

Whereupon Monin allowed the girl to take his hand and lead him to a corner of the salon, where she whispered in his ear:

"It's been a very fine day, monsieur."

Monin stared at the young lady with a dazed expression.

"What must I answer?" said he.

"Nothing," was the reply.

And the girl returned to her place, while Monin found his way back to his wife, saying to the people about him:

"It's a pretty game! I didn't know that I knew how to play it."

The next forfeit was Athalie's. She was condemned to *sulk*, and all the men sulked with her; and while sulking, Dalville obtained an assignation. A very pretty thing, these innocent games! Well-brought-up young ladies are forbidden to waltz, but they are permitted to give or receive confidences, to hide with a young man, or to wait in a little dark closet until the concierge of the convent is relieved; and there are always kisses to be given and received in corners, secretly, behind curtains. If I ever have a daughter, I shall allow her to waltz in my presence, but forbid her to play *innocent* games.

The spectacled man was condemned to pay a compliment without using the letter *a*. After scratching his forehead, he stepped into the middle of the circle and said with a satisfied air: "*La femme est le chef-d'oeuvre du monde.*"

The next forfeit was Madame Monin's, who was told to take a trip to Cythera. She sprang to her feet and offered her hand to Monsieur Bisbis, saying:

"Come and travel with me."

The stout man submitted to be led into a small study, the door of which Madame Monin closed behind them, and Monsieur Monin, observing the manœuvre, said to one of his neighbors:

"What are they going to do in there?"

"They're in Cythera."

"Oh, yes! I see what it is—another confidence; she's going to tell him that it's a fine day to-day. I know the game now."

After remaining some time, Bichette and her companion returned from Cythera; and some ladies noticed that the turban was somewhat out of place, and that Monsieur Bisbis did not know which leg to stand on—all of which did not prevent Monin from going to meet his wife and asking:

"Is it nice, Bichette?"

"What, monsieur?"

"At Cythera."

"Very nice, monsieur."

This reply was accompanied by a wanton glance at Monsieur Bisbis, who scratched his nose longer than usual, while Monin approached him with his snuff-box, saying:

"Do you take it too?"

The games were interrupted by the punch, which Domingo passed around among the guests. He passed the salver to the ladies, who made a great to-do about taking a glass of punch, which they declared was too strong, although some of them partook a second time. The men crowded about Domingo and seized the punch on the wing. Monin ran after the platter, which had passed him several times; but he had not been able to capture a glass. At last, after following Domingo throughout his

winding course among the guests, Monin succeeded in stopping him as he was returning to the dining-room.

"One minute, negro!" he said, putting out his hand toward the salver. Domingo halted, muttering:

"You want drink again?"

"What's that? again!" cried Monin; "my word! he's a good one, he is! I haven't had a taste, and I'm very fond of punch."

As he spoke Monin glanced at the salver: all the glasses were empty. The poor man was thunderstruck.

"Me come again right away.—More punch, all hot," said Domingo, as he left the room; and Monin, for consolation, drew his snuff-box, and returned to the games, saying to himself:

"I must try to catch him sooner than I did this time."

Madame Monin, whom the trip to Cythera had made extremely warm, said to her husband when he returned to her side:

"Go get me another glass of punch, Monsieur Monin; the one I had wasn't half full; I am sure that it's done on purpose so that they can pass it round oftener without making any more."

"The negro has no more, Bichette; but he told me he'd come right back with some hot punch. So I——"

"All right, that will do. Go away now; I believe this gentleman is coming to ask me to make the *pont d'amour*."

But Madame Monin's hope was disappointed; it was not to her that the young officer condemned to make the *pont d'amour* addressed himself but to Athalie, who laughingly assisted him to perform his penance; and Dalville observed with some vexation that the petite-maitresse made the *pont d'amour* with others as readily as with him. For consolation he gave a kiss *à la capucine* to a young lady whose husband emulated the Knight of the

Rueful Countenance; and the school-girl received her youthful cousin's confidence while her mamma was arranging for another forfeit; and the pretty creature who held them in her dress pouted because the young officer had ceased to draw them; and the spectacled gentleman had been trying for an hour to draw another forfeit; while for most of those present the game was simply a pretext to enable everybody to remain beside the person to whom he or she was most attracted. That is something which the papas and mammas do not always see, and about which husbands give themselves little concern; but it is perfectly apparent to the keen observer, who seeks in a salon something besides an *écarté* table, or a commonplace conversation with people whom he has never met before and whom he has no desire to meet again.

A fresh supply of punch diverted attention from the private conversations, and from the games, which were beginning to flag. Domingo was surrounded again and Monin started on the negro's trail; but the young men who laughingly besieged the salver constantly put aside the ex-druggist, who did not reach Domingo's side until the glasses were once more empty.

Sorely vexed, Monin returned to his wife, who had just finished her third glass and handed it to her husband to take away.

"It's rather good, isn't it, monsieur?" she said.

"I don't know whether it's good or not," growled Monin angrily; "I haven't succeeded yet in getting a taste of it."

"Because you're not clever and don't know how to go about it. You should have seen Monsieur Bisbis, how he pounced on the salver! I thought for a minute that he was going to take all the glasses. But you're so slow!"

"I'll tell you, Bichette—it's that negro——"

"Go away from here, monsieur. They're going to play *la mer agitée* and I must be in it."

"What is *agitée*, Bichette?"

Seeing that his wife was paying no attention to him, it occurred to Monsieur Monin to lie in ambush at the door of the salon; in that way he hoped to be the first to seize the negro as he passed, and so make sure of some punch. Highly pleased with his scheme, Monin took his stand like a sentinel at the entrance to the salon, stuffing his nose with snuff in order to be more patient. But he waited more than half an hour and Domingo did not appear. Monin ventured to glance into the dining-room. He smelt the punch; that sweet-smelling vapor indicated that the mixture was not all consumed. He crept into the reception room, and, guided by the odor, reached a small door, which stood ajar, and discovered Domingo drinking punch, not from a small glass, but from a large porcelain pitcher. Monin was standing, speechless with surprise, in his corner, when Baptiste appeared from the servants' quarters with a plate full of biscuits. He pushed the negro aside, tossed off several glasses in quick succession, then dipped his biscuits in the punch and ate them hurriedly, while Domingo, by way of compensation, stuffed macaroons and nutcakes into his jacket pockets.

Monin was wondering whether he should go away, or should ask the servants' leave to take something, when Monsieur Destival, who had been calling vainly for Domingo and Baptiste in the salon, appeared on the scene and surprised them.

"Ah! you knaves! you scoundrels! I have caught you at it!" he cried, rushing at his servants. Domingo ran from the room, but Baptiste stood his ground, and retorted, undismayed:

"Don't yell so loud for a little punch! Don't make such a row! I was very glad to have a drop of it myself; I've worked hard enough to-day."

"What does this mean, villain? You presume to argue! You wretch! eating my biscuit too! rascal! thief!"

"Thief!" retorted Baptiste, glaring at Monsieur Destival with a furious expression; "don't you dare to insult me—that wouldn't be good for you! I must be mighty good-natured to stay in your old shanty, where the servants don't get anything to eat or drink! And what about my wages for two years, that I can't get hold of a sou of! to say nothing of the money I've advanced."

"All right, Baptiste, hush!" said Monsieur Destival in a lower tone; "that's enough, I won't say any more."

"But I tell you that I'm tired of it," rejoined Baptiste, shouting louder than ever. "Oh, yes! you hire a black man and you don't pay me any more'n you do the baker and butcher and fruit woman and grocer, whose abuse I have to listen to every morning! Well! I want my money, and if you don't like it, I don't care a hang; with all the airs you put on, I know what's what."

"Hush, for heaven's sake, Baptiste! What's the meaning of all this foolish talk? Come, my boy, eat another biscuit, and then go to bed."

Baptiste's shouting had attracted several persons from the salon.

"What is it? what's the matter?" they asked one another; and Destival made haste to reply:

"It's nothing; my valet is drunk and doesn't know what he's saying."

"No, I ain't drunk either," cried Baptiste, walking toward the door; "pay me my wages instead of calling me 'thief.'"

Destival hastily closed the door on Baptiste's heels and locked it.

"The poor fellow," he said, "talks like a fool when he's drunk; but I overlook it, because he's very much attached to me."

The people who had come thither pretended to believe what Monsieur Destival said, because it would have been discourteous to do otherwise; but they exchanged stealthy glances, laughed and whispered together, and made comments under their breath, while Baptiste, unable to return to the room, beat a devil's tattoo on the door, shouting in a hoarse voice:

"My wages! pay me and discharge me; that's just what I'd like! I get tired of hearing the row your creditors make every day."

Luckily the closed door muffled Baptiste's voice to some extent; and, in order that he might be heard even less distinctly, the business agent shouted louder than he:

"All right, Baptiste, all right! You'll be sorry for this, but I forgive you; I know that you're faithful, and that's enough for me."

Meanwhile Monin had seen his last hope fade away; for it was not to be presumed that the servants would bring more punch to the salon; so he returned to his wife. The guests were discussing the scene in the reception-room, even in the midst of their innocent games; and Madame Monin exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! if I hadn't been presenting my *little box of amourettes* at that moment, I shouldn't have lost a word of what that Baptiste said. But you were there, Monsieur Monin, and heard everything. What happened?"

"I was watching for the negro to get some punch, Bichette, and it was he who drank it."

"Who's he?"

"The black."

"Who's the black?"

"The servant in a red jacket."

"Well?"

"Well, then he took macaroons—No, I believe it was the other one who ate biscuits first—I am not perfectly sure."

"Oh! you tell a story wretchedly, Monsieur Monin! Instead of listening to what was said, you were engrossed by biscuit and macaroons. For shame! you are such a glutton! You go into company only to drink and eat."

"But, Bichette, when I tell you that I didn't——"

"Bah! hold your tongue and find my shawl; everyone's going, you see."

In truth, the time for departure had arrived, and the mammas had already donned their bonnets and shawls, The younger women took more time to find their wraps, and some obliging young man was always at hand to offer to help a pretty girl to find what she wanted. They still had something to say to one another before separating, and they chose to take advantage of the confusion that prevailed in the salon at that moment.

Dalville had heard nothing of the scene in the reception room, being occupied in kissing *what was beneath the candlestick*, which he had taken pains to place over the head of a very attractive young woman; so that he gave little thought to what was happening elsewhere. And Madame de la Thomassinière, intent only upon making new victims, had not listened to the unkind remarks concerning the host and hostess that were flying about in all directions.

Soon the salon was nearly empty. The ladies took their leave and Auguste did likewise, well pleased that he had passed the evening without playing *écarté*, and to have discovered that one can enjoy oneself without losing money. When he reached home he went upstairs and rang, but no one opened the door. As Bertrand usually sat up for his master, little Tony seldom carried a key. Having rung again with no better success, Auguste reflected that Bertrand, whom he had told to go out and enjoy himself, might very well not have returned; so he sent Tony to inquire of the concierge and he remained on the landing, thinking that a few days earlier he would readily have found a place to pass the night without leaving the house.

His neighbor, who had probably heard him come upstairs and ring, donned a peignoir and left her room, candle in hand. She went down one flight and saw her neighbor calmly pacing the floor of the landing. She descended a few more stairs, coughed slightly, and decided at last to go down to him. A pretty woman is very seductive in a peignoir, with her hair loosely secured by a silk handkerchief, from beneath which a few stray locks escape and fall upon a white breast, which the peignoir never conceals altogether, because there are always one or two ill-placed pins, which betray the secrets of beauty, or, perhaps, act as its confederates.

"Can't you get in, Monsieur Dalville?" asked Madame Saint-Edmond, in the soft voice which she could assume so readily when she was not left behind with a bill to pay.

Auguste bowed low to his neighbor and replied coldly: "As you see, madame."

"Monsieur Bertrand must have forgotten himself somewhere. Perhaps something has happened to him."

"I trust not."

"That would be a great pity! such a fine fellow, and so fond of you!"

Léonie heaved a profound sigh and said nothing more. Auguste leaned over the rail to see if Tony were coming up. Léonie, finding that Auguste said nothing more, decided to reopen the conversation.

"Perhaps you would like to sit in my room, monsieur, until you can get in? I should think that you would be more comfortable than on this landing."

"I thank you, madame, but I do not wish to disturb you or to interfere with your sleep."

"It won't disturb me, monsieur. As for my sleep, for several days I haven't slept at all."

"Is it because you have lost your poodle again, madame?"

"How unkind! How you make fun of my grief!"

Léonie heaved a more profound sigh than before, and as she had no handkerchief, she lifted a corner of her peignoir and put it to her eyes. That movement discovered some very seductive things; but when one is weeping, one cannot think of everything, and when one's eyes are covered, one cannot see what one has disclosed.

Auguste, distrusting his weakness, continued to lean over the rail, and did not take his eyes from the concierge's door.

"Well, Tony, are you coming back to-night?" he cried.

Léonie walked to where he stood and said in a touching voice:

"Mon Dieu! what on earth have I done to you, monsieur?"

"What have you done to me, madame? Why, it seems to me that you know quite as well as I do."

"Oh! monsieur, how can an intelligent man trust appearances?"

"It seems to me, madame, that no intelligence was required to see what I saw."

"Why, what did you see, monsieur? May not a woman dine with a man at a restaurant without having the slightest preference for him? And you yourself, monsieur—what were you doing with that creature who had the impertinence to hold a mustard pot under my nose?"

"Oh! I am more honest than you, madame: I admit that I deceived you."

"Ah! what an unhappy creature I am!"

And Léonie had recourse to her usual expedient—she fainted; but she was careful to fall toward Auguste, who found himself with his neighbor in his arms. At that moment little Tony came upstairs and said that it was impossible to understand what Schtrack said, as he was drunk. Auguste gently laid Léonie on the stairs and told Tony to look after her; then he went down to interview his concierge, who was half asleep and could hardly speak.

"Has Bertrand come in?" demanded Auguste, shaking the old German's arm; whereupon he raised his head and sent a puff of wine-laden breath into the young man's face as he hiccoughed:

"Pertrand! sacretié! Pertrand!"

"Come, Schtrack, speak out; you were with him, weren't you?"

"Ya."

"Where is he?"

"Haf you not found him?"

"If I had found him, should I be questioning you? Where is he? where did you leave him? why didn't he come home with you?"

"Sacretié! I vas not strong enough to carry Pertrand; he could not valk no more; but ve haf ein pig lot trunken."

"So I see; but where shall I find Bertrand?"

"Ach! you vill see him quite vell; dere is no tanger! He is in a safe blace—up the street. Go up und up—near the Parrière Montmartre."

"Is he in a wine-shop?"

"No; don't I tell you that you vill see him quite vell?"

Unable to extract any further information from Schtrack, Auguste decided to go in search of Bertrand; he succeeded in getting the door opened, and went out in the middle of the night to try to find his faithful comrade, with no other guide than the very vague information given him by Schtrack. From Rue Saint-Georges where he lived, he went by way of Rue Saint-Lazare to Rue des Martyrs, knowing that Montmartre was Bertrand's usual promenade.

Desiring to avail himself of the permission Auguste had given him, Bertrand had invited Schtrack to go for a walk with him. The old German did not think of refusing; and, leaving his wife in his place, he polished his boots, took his cane and accompanied friend Bertrand, who had no sooner passed the porte cochère than he began on the battle of Wagram, which was certain to take them a very long way. In fact, the battle of Wagram was still in progress when they arrived at the Buttes de Montmartre, without once stopping for a drink. Schtrack, who had thus far ventured upon nothing beyond a *sacretié!* proposed that they should go into a wine-shop, which proposition was instantly acted upon. They found the wine very poor because they were accustomed to Dalville's cellar, and they left that wine-shop.

to look for a better one. They went into another, drank another bottle, decided again that it was poor stuff and went in search of a third. After four hours of prospecting they had visited six wine-shops and drunk six bottles. When they reached the seventh, they began to think that the wine was better, or rather they were no longer in condition to pass judgment on it. Bertrand began again on his campaigns; Schtrack smoked four cigars, and it was nearly midnight when our friends were informed that it was closing time.

Bertrand paid without looking at the bill, and they left the shop; but the fresh air put the finishing touch to their intoxication. Bertrand especially, who was not accustomed to poor wine, soon felt his legs begin to wobble, and at the corner of Rue des Martyrs and Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, he fell, reviling himself as a coward and sluggard and a wretched drinker.

Schtrack, who had kept his head better because he was used to wine-shop wine, emitted a *sacretié!* when he saw Bertrand fall, and tried to raise him. He could not succeed. After several minutes, during which Schtrack exclaimed from time to time: "Come, come, comrade Bertrand, off we go!" the old German discovered that his companion was already snoring as if he were in his bed.

"So, so! he's asleep!" thought Schtrack; "I must not wake him; he pe vell comfort there to sleep. Put, suppose some carriage might pass und not see mein comrade!"

This reflection disturbed Schtrack, who was quite ready to go to sleep himself; but, looking about, he saw a grocer's shop still open. Thither he went post haste and asked for a lamp. They gave it to him, after lighting it at his request. Beacon in hand, Schtrack returned to Bertrand, who was still sleeping peacefully, stretched out

by the wall. The old concierge took the sleeper's hat, placed it beside his head with the lamp upon it, and went away, saying to himself:

"Now, there is no tanger, he can sleep in beace."

Auguste spied the lamp, but for which he would have passed Bertrand without seeing him. The young man could not help smiling at Schtrack's ingenious device. He shook the ex-corporal, who opened his eyes, half rose, pushed the guardian lamp away with his elbow, and could not imagine why he was in the street. Auguste explained matters to him. Bertrand, whom his nap had sobered, was distressed that he had forgotten himself to the point of falling drunk in the street, and insisted on throwing himself into the river, to punish himself for drinking so much wine. Auguste succeeded in pacifying him, and they returned home, the young man thinking of Léonie's treachery, Athalie's coquetry, Denise's dissembling, and promising himself to be more prudent in future; Bertrand recalling the wretched wine at the wine-shops, and swearing that he would drink no more.

XIII

DENISE AND COCO IN PARIS

Not more than ten days had passed after Dalville's visit to Montfermeil, when, on returning from the wine-shop one evening, Père Calieux, who probably saw double, or else did not see at all, fell into a ditch newly dug beside the road; in that ditch was a pile of stones intended for repairing the road, and the peasant broke his head upon them. The next day little Coco was an orphan.

But he still had Denise, who loved him dearly, Mère Fourcy, who had become attached to him, and lastly, the friendly interest of Auguste. Among friends who give us proofs of affection, we cease to feel quite alone on earth. How many unhappy creatures there are, who might well believe themselves to be orphans although their parents are not dead!

Denise paid a few small debts which Père Calleux had left, amounting to less than a hundred francs; for a poor man can get but little credit. The cabin remained—the child's only patrimony; but it was in such a tumble-down condition that it was dangerous to live in it. The thatched roof was half gone, the cracked walls threatened to fall, and the materials of which it was built were so poor that no use could be made of them. So that there was really nothing but the land; but with Dalville's contribution it would be possible to build a little cottage, surround it with a garden and cultivate it. That is what Denise said to her aunt, who replied:

"Don't be in a hurry, my child. You'd better wait till the gentleman comes again, and ask him what he thinks."

But at sixteen one does not like to wait; Denise reflected that it might be a very long time before the handsome gentleman came to the village again, and one morning, as she looked at the address which Auguste had left with her, and to which her eyes very often turned, she exclaimed:

"Suppose we write to that gentleman, aunt! He gave us his address, you know, so that we could send word to him if we needed him."

"You're right, my child," said Mère Fourcy; "your ideas are always good. You know how to write, so you must write to him, my girl."

Denise was lost in thought and did not reply.

"Have you forgotten how to write, my child?" continued Mère Fourcy.

"Oh! no, aunt; but I can't write well enough to write to a gentleman from Paris."

"In that case, my dear, get that old man to write to him, who's just come here to live, and who writes all the nurses' letters. He handles his pen fine, I tell you! He'll write a sentence two pages long to tell you your child's had the colic, or needs a new cap. Or else ask neighbor Mauflard to do you the favor; he's an old schoolmaster, and he ought to write like a Barème's grammar!"

Denise was still silent; but after a moment she said, lowering her eyes:

"Don't you think, aunt, that it would be better to go to Paris and speak to the gentleman? Wouldn't it be more polite than writing?"

"You're right again, my child; and there's a little stage that starts for Paris at eight o'clock every morning and brings you back at four."

"And then, aunt, I've been to Paris twice, you know, and nothing ever happened to me."

"All right, my child, go ahead; nothing ever happens to anybody unless they want it to."

"And I'll take Coco with me, shan't I, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear; that will please the gentleman. It will be polite to him; and if I wasn't so busy here, I'd go with you and ask him to give me some dinner, because I know what's the right thing to do, you see."

Denise was quite as well pleased that her aunt should not go with her; but she was overjoyed that she herself was allowed to go, and she ran off to engage seats for herself and Coco for the next day. The rest of that day

she spent in preparing her dress. Coco jumped for joy when he learned that he was going in a stage to see his kind friend, and Mère Fourcy packed two pairs of chickens, two dozen eggs, some fruit and cake, in a basket, as a present for the young gentleman in Paris.

Denise was up before dawn. It was early in October; but it was a lovely day, and reminded the girl of that on which she first met Auguste. Her toilet was soon made; she wore a new dress and her daintiest cap—the one in which, on Sundays, she turned the heads of all the young men in the village, and drove the girls to despair. But would that pretty cap have the same power in Paris? Denise had no desire to make conquests; there was but one person whom she wished to please, although she said to herself a hundred times a day:

“No, no! I am not in love with him.”

Coco was dressed very neatly. Mère Fourcy gave them the basket, saying:

“Give him my compliments, and tell him to think of me when he eats the chickens, and to tell me how he likes that cake!”

Denise and Coco ran, for fear of missing the stage; at last they were safely inside, the basket between Denise’s legs, and they started for Paris.

It was not a long journey; but it seemed endless to Denise; whereas the child, delighted to be in the stage, wished that they might never arrive. However, they reached the stage office on Rue Saint-Martin in due course, and Denise, taking the basket on her arm, took Coco by the hand, and having inquired the way to Rue Saint-Georges, started in the direction of the Chaussée-d’Antin.

Denise’s beauty and her peasant costume attracted more than one compliment on the way; but the girl quickened

her pace without replying, although the basket was very heavy and Coco began to be fatigued by walking on the pavements.

When one is unfamiliar with a place, one is likely to walk farther than is necessary. Denise many times mistook one street for another; she disliked to inquire, because they to whom she applied seemed inclined to offer her their arms. She was warm and perspiring, and Coco was cross and kept saying:

“Where’s my kind friend, I’d like to know?”

They had been walking more than an hour when they found themselves at last on Rue Saint-Georges.

“Here we are, Coco,” said Denise, joyously; “here’s Monsieur Auguste’s house, and you’ll soon have a chance to embrace your kind friend! He’ll be glad to see you. Oh, yes! I’m sure he’ll give us a warm welcome.”

The child forgot his fatigue. They passed under the porte cochère, and Denise looked about in embarrassment. She could not control her emotion, and she halted with the child and her basket between two handsome stairways, uncertain which way to turn; while Coco began to cry at the top of his voice:

“My kind friend, we’ve brought you some cake and some fruit!”

“Vat’s all this how-d’ye-do?” said Schtrack, opening his door and glaring at the young woman and the child, who were standing in the middle of the courtyard. “I say, my girl, haf you come here to sell geese?”

Denise blushed, and stammered as she looked at Schtrack:

“Which way shall I go up, monsieur?”

“You mustn’t go up at all, sacretié! This is not ein boultry market. Go outside und yell mit te leedle broder.”

Schtrack was about to come forth to turn Denise and the child into the street, when Bertrand came downstairs, and was thunderstruck to see the girl.

"What! is it you, my child?—and little Coco too?"

"Yes, Monsieur Bertrand, it's us. Oh! I'm so glad to see you! he was just going to turn us out of the house."

"What's that? you were going to turn this girl out, Schtrack?"

"Sacretié! why haf she not told me what she want? Te leedle poy, he bray like a tonkey in the courtyard: 'Kind freund! kind freund! see the cakes!'—Did I know his kind freund?"

"It's my fault, Monsieur Bertrand; I didn't think—I was so confused. Can't we see Monsieur Auguste?"

"Yes, indeed," Bertrand replied with some embarrassment. "Oh, yes! you shall see him. Come upstairs with me, Mamzelle Denise."

The girl and the child followed Bertrand, who admitted them with some precaution into Auguste's apartment and took them at once to the small salon, saying:

"Stay here and rest, and wait a little while."

"Has Monsieur Auguste gone out?"

"No, but he—he has company; he's busy just at this minute."

"Tell him we're here, Monsieur Bertrand, and I'll bet he'll come right away. We won't keep him long."

"Yes, I'll tell him that. But wait; I'll be back in a minute."

Bertrand left the salon, being careful to close the door behind him. Denise examined the fine furniture and pictures with which the room was embellished, and Coco lay on a couch. But the moments passed and nobody came. The girl's heart sank; she had secretly hoped that

Auguste would be glad to see her, and the lack of haste which he displayed in coming to her, made her fear that she had flattered herself too much.

She dared not leave the room, or even open a door. Coco had fallen asleep; the girl seated herself in a corner, refrained from making the slightest noise, in order not to wake the child, and gazed ruefully at the basket containing the gifts she had brought to the fine city gentleman.

At last Bertrand returned with a dissatisfied air, and said in an undertone:

"You are tired of waiting, aren't you? Thunder and guns! I can understand that; but it ain't my fault, mamzelle, because my orders before everything! I don't know anything but my orders."

"Isn't Monsieur Auguste at home?"

"Oh, yes! he's at home, but he can't see you yet, because his orders—"

"But, Monsieur Bertrand, it isn't polite not to come and speak to people; with us, we don't leave our friends all alone like this."

"Oh! it's different in Paris, mamzelle. I know what my lieutenant promised to do to me if I disturbed him when he's—busy; and I can't disobey orders."

"Then we'll go away."

"Wait a little longer; perhaps it won't be very long."

At that moment they heard sounds in the reception-room, and Mademoiselle Virginie entered the salon.

"Here I am!" she cried; "I snapped my fingers at your orders, I did! That old villain of a Schtrack didn't want to let me come up. 'Monsir isn't in,' he says. But I came on all the same.—I say! who's this little farmer's wench? She's not so bad-looking! Is it on her account that Monsieur Auguste closes his door to his friends?"

Denise stared at Virginie in amazement, while Bertrand motioned to the latter to be quiet, saying in an irritated tone :

"It seems to me, mademoiselle, that when a concierge says that you can't come up, you should respect his orders."

"Go to the deuce with your orders! He told me there wasn't anyone here, and he lied, you see. Bertrand, who on earth is this rustic beauty?"

"She's a young girl from the country."

"Pardi! I can see for myself that she don't live on Rue Vivienne. What a sly fox he is!—What is she here for? Is it her young one asleep on the couch? The devil! he's quite a big boy already!"

"This is a most respectable young woman, mademoiselle; she came to bid Monsieur Dalville good-day, and brought this child, that he thinks a great deal of. There isn't the slightest harm in that."

"All right! so much the better, if there's no harm. I say! what an amusing fellow you are, Bertrand, when you put on that severe expression! It's a fact that the girl has a very innocent look. I'm sure that her cap would be mighty becoming to me."

During this conversation, which was carried on in undertones, Denise kept her eyes on the floor; she saw that Mademoiselle Virginie looked at her a great deal, and that redoubled her embarrassment.

"Why on earth does Monsieur Dalville keep this sweet child waiting?" said Virginie, assuming an affable air and approaching Denise.

"Because monsieur is busy and told me not to disturb him."

"Ah, yes! I understand, I comprehend! *Ask me no more!*"

Bertrand motioned to her to be silent; but she sat down beside Denise, paying no attention to the ex-corporal.

"Have you come far, mademoiselle?"

"From Montfermeil, madame," replied Denise timidly. The word madame seemed to flatter Virginie, who threw her head back and tried to assume a dignified bearing, as she rejoined:

"Montfermeil? that's in the direction of Sceaux, I believe?"

"No, madame, it's near Raincy."

"Ah, yes! to be sure; I was mixed up. Is the little fellow asleep yonder your brother?"

"No, madame, he's a poor little orphan, that Monsieur Auguste is taking care of."

"The deuce! does Auguste do that kind of thing? That's very fine of him, and I am glad to hear it; it gives him a higher place in my esteem.—And you want to see Auguste, do you?"

"Yes, madame; Coco's father has just died, and I wanted to consult Monsieur Dalville."

"What have you got in that basket?"

"Some little presents from our place—eggs and chickens, and some cake that my aunt made herself."

"Oh! I'm awfully fond of village-made cake! Will you let me taste it, my young village maid?"

Denise would have preferred to present the cake untouched to Auguste; but she dared not refuse Mademoiselle Virginie, who instantly opened the basket and broke off a big piece, which she proceeded to eat, continuing the conversation meanwhile.

"I'm very much afraid, my dear, that you've come here for nothing."

"Why so, madame?"

"Oh! that ne'er-do-well will let you cool your heels here till to-morrow morning."

"Who, madame?"

"Why, Auguste, to be sure! The cake is fine, and the butter delicious. It reminds me of my childhood; I used to eat cake like this every night; I bought it for four sous at the little shop on Boulevard Saint-Denis, where there's always a line waiting; it's famous for this cake.—To go back, I was saying, my dear, that Dalville is undoubtedly with some hussy or other, and that's why we can't speak to him."

"What! do you think so, madame?"

"Oh! I'm sure of it! Do you suppose I don't know all about it? Bertrand's embarrassment, and the concierge's orders. In fact, it's a most surprising thing that he let you come up."

"It was Monsieur Bertrand who made him let me in; if it hadn't been for him, I should have been sent away."

"For my part, it's all a matter of indifference to me; I look on Auguste as my brother now. But you are pale, my child! Don't you feel well?"

"Yes, madame, I'm all right."

"How lucky you are, my child, to be virtuous, and not to know anything about the passions! Always retain this innocence.—Bertrand, can't you see that this cake is choking me? For heaven's sake, give me something to drink, and this child will take something too."

"No, thank you, madame."

"Ah! the little fellow's waking up!"

Coco opened his eyes and looked about in amazement; then ran to Denise, saying:

"Where's my kind friend?"

"Oh! I guess we shan't see him," said the girl, in a tremulous voice, looking at the clock, which marked the

quarter-past three, then turning her eyes on Bertrand with an imploring expression, as if to urge him to call Auguste.

"He's a pretty little fellow," said Virginie, passing her hand over Coco's head. "I'd like to have a child like him, because a child gives one a respectable look."

A bell rang in the next room.

"Monsieur is calling me," said Bertrand; and he hurried from the salon. At the same moment little Tony ran rapidly downstairs to put the horse in the cabriolet.

Denise expected every minute to see Auguste come in. Virginie was playing with Coco. At last Denise recognized Dalville's voice, speaking earnestly to Bertrand, and in a moment the young man entered the salon. But he had his hat on his head, his gloves in his hand, and seemed in a great hurry. The girl ran to meet him, with the child, taking her basket in her hand.

"Good-afternoon, Denise! good-afternoon, my boy!" said Auguste, kissing the child and taking no notice of Virginie. "Have you been waiting for me? I am very sorry that I can't stay with you now."

"Monsieur, my aunt sends you her respects," said Denise, "and these chickens, eggs, pears, and——"

"Thanks, Denise, thanks! I——"

"Pray, come, monsieur; I am waiting!" said a woman's voice impatiently in the reception-room—a voice which strongly resembled Madame de la Thomassinière's.

"Adieu, adieu! I will see you again," said Auguste to Denise.

And, giving her no time to reply, he hastily left the room, closing the door behind him, and went out of the house with a young woman enveloped in a great shawl and covered with a thick veil, who shrank out of sight on the back seat of the cabriolet.

Denise stood perfectly still, basket in hand; but great tears rolled from her eyes, and the basket would have dropped, had not Virginie, who had drawn near, saved it as she caught the girl in her arms.

"Well, well! what on earth's the matter with you, my dear? On my word! she's really crying! Mon Dieu! is she going to faint?—Bring me something, Bertrand!—The idea of being unhappy just for a man, my dear girl! God bless me! they ain't worth the trouble! If you knew 'em as well as I do! I admit that Monsieur Auguste wasn't very polite, to hardly answer you and not even thank you!—Ah! her color's coming back a little.—It really scared me to see you like that!"

Denise took out her handkerchief, wiped her eyes, and called Coco.

"Come, my dear, let's go," she said; "we must go back to the village."

"Ain't my kind friend coming with us?" said Coco, as he took Denise's hand.

"Oh, no! he hasn't even time to speak to us. Come, Coco, let's go. We must be at the stage office at four."

"I'll show you the way, my dear," said Virginie; "you might lose yourself in Paris."

"I was going to offer you my arm, mamzelle," said Bertrand.

"No, thanks, Monsieur Bertrand, don't put yourself out; it isn't necessary."

"Why not, Mamzelle Denise?"

"We'll find the way all right. As for Monsieur Auguste, tell him we won't trouble him any more."

"You're wrong to be put out with him, Mamzelle Denise; if somebody hadn't been waiting for him——"

"Yes, to be sure," said Virginie, "it was very polite of him: to not so much as thank this pretty child for her

present! magnificent chickens, fine pears, and fresh eggs! Fresh eggs are so good! Will you allow me to put three in my bag for my breakfast to-morrow?"

"As many as you please, madame," said Denise; "for I see very clearly that Monsieur Auguste cares very little indeed for what we took so much pleasure in bringing him."

"I tell you, my dear, that men ain't worth a pirouette," said Virginie, putting four eggs into her reticule; then she followed Denise, who left the room with the child, refusing Bertrand's escort.

Madame Saint-Edmond was coming upstairs with a young man at the moment that Denise, with a heavy heart and red eyes, left Dalville's apartment, leading Coco by the hand. Léonie was furiously angry with Auguste since he had left her in a swoon on the landing, to go in search of Bertrand. Having abandoned the hope of renewing her relations with him, she seized every opportunity to annoy him. That is the way in which a woman who has never loved always takes her revenge.

When she saw the peasant girl coming from Dalville's apartment, Madame Saint-Edmond stopped, looked at her with a sneer, and said to her companion:

"Ah! rather a queer rig; but she has come here to be educated, no doubt."

"What's that, what does she say?" cried Virginie, who was following Denise, and had overheard Léonie's last words; but the latter hurried upstairs.

"I don't know," said Denise; "I never saw the lady before, so she couldn't have been speaking to me."

"Oh! I know her," said Virginie, running up a few stairs and looking after Léonie. "Oh, yes! I know her. I don't advise her to put on airs. *We won't go to the forest again without paying for our dinner.*"

But Madame Saint-Edmond had already entered her room and closed her door. Virginie left the house with Denise, to whom she had taken a fancy; and she fairly forced her to take her arm for the walk to the stage office.

Denise was depressed and replied briefly to the innumerable questions which Virginie asked her; but she was perfectly well able to carry on a conversation all alone. When they arrived at the office, the stage was ready to start. Virginie kissed Denise and said to her:

“Adieu, my dear! Don’t be downcast like this. You’re very lucky to live in the country; it’s a thousand times better than this rascally Paris! You’ll find more lovers in your village than you want. I say! is that the stage? It’s a regular little chamber-pot like the one that goes to Saint-Denis. When I have time, I’ll come and see you, and you must teach me how to make butter. Adieu, my dear girl.—Be careful, driver, and don’t get upset; remember that you have a Love in your little pot.”

Denise and Coco started for home less cheerful than when they set out. The event often falsifies our hopes, and we find pain where we had thought to find pleasure.

XIV

THE SCHOOL FOR PARVENUS

“Poor Denise was very downhearted when she went away,” said Bertrand to Auguste on the day following the girl’s trip to Paris.

“I was very sorry indeed not to be able to talk with her any longer,” Dalville replied; “but it wasn’t my fault—that lady was waiting for me.”

"That lady! That lady might perhaps have waited a few minutes more."

"Bertrand!"

"Excuse me, lieutenant; the fact is, I was really distressed to see you hardly speak to that girl, at whose home we were treated so hospitably. Just remember the welcome they gave us, and how delighted they were to see you!"

"Oh! I haven't forgotten it."

"You didn't even thank her for her present!"

"I didn't see it. But we will go to the village soon, and I will make up for my neglect. I am to dine at Madame de la Thomassinière's to-day, Bertrand; there will be a lot of people, and a large party in the evening. Probably I shall not come home until morning. By the way, make a memorandum to the effect that I have lent a hundred louis to Monsieur le Marquis de Cligneval, who was very unlucky at cards a day or two ago, at a house where I happened to be; he is to pay me very soon."

Bertrand did not reply; but as he went to the cash-box he muttered:

"More money that we shall never see again! He's forever lending, and no one ever pays him back!"

Monsieur de la Thomassinière, whose fortune increased every day, determined to celebrate his wife's birthday by a grand demonstration. The invitations had been issued a week in advance. There was every indication that the banquet would be the most sumptuous that the speculator had ever given. He expected to have at his table marquises and chevaliers who deigned to call him their friend; poets who had promised to mention him in their works; and some old acquaintances whom he expected to overcome by the magnificence of the festivity. Monsieur and Madame Destival were in the last category.

Everybody was in motion in Monsieur de la Thomas-sinière's palatial mansion. The upholsterers had decorated the salons, prepared the chandeliers and candelabra. The servants flew hither and thither carrying orders; the scullions obeyed the behests of their commander. Three women were in attendance on madame, who had been at her toilet since three o'clock, and it was now five. But Athalie was fickle in her tastes: the thing that pleased her one day displeased her the next day; she had already cast aside two caps, in which she declared that she was hideously ugly; she lost her patience, raged, stamped, tore a superb piece of tulle, pulled a bouquet to pieces, scolded her women, and was on the verge of hysteria because they brought her a set of blue jewelry when she wanted violet. At last they succeeded in pacifying her by assuring her that her hair was arranged to perfection; she deigned to look at herself in the mirror, scowled at first, then smiled, and said at last:

"It is true; I look rather well."

At half-past five the guests began to arrive. Monsieur de la Thomassinière, who was a little less insolent in his own house than in other people's houses, went to meet the titled personages who had condescended to do him the honor of accepting his dinner, and deigned to bestow a smile upon those whom he had honored with an invitation.

Monsieur and Madame Destival arrived in due course. Since he had had a negro, the business agent had adopted the habit of blinking, and pretended to be very short-sighted. His wife was attired with an elegance that rivalled Athalie's own; and her intelligent eyes seemed to assume an even more malicious expression as they rested on the master and mistress of the house.

All the guests appeared at last, Auguste among them. It was a brilliant assemblage: women of fashion, dandies,

men with decorations, filled the salon, where Athalie did the honors, apportioning her courtesies to the rank or wealth of their recipients. Monsieur de la Thomassinière stalked proudly through the rooms, saying:

"This affair will make a great sensation! The marquis has promised to mention it at court; there's a poet here, who's a newspaper man too, and he tells me that my name will appear in an article of at least a column! My name in an article a column long! The deuce! how popular I shall be! When Destival can give a dinner like mine, I'll agree that he can call himself somebody. Poor creatures! they are dying of envy, and I'm glad of it!"

At half-past six the company repaired to the dining-room, where the table was laid with forty covers. Monsieur Destival was seated at the lower end, between a child of six and an old deaf gentleman. He swallowed the affront, with a glance at his wife; and their eyes exchanged a meaning look in which they seemed to promise themselves a sweet revenge.

The soup had just been removed, when an uproar, evidently occasioned by people quarrelling, arose in the adjoining room.

"What does this mean? Lafleur! Jasmin! Who dares to make a disturbance in my house?" exclaimed Monsieur de la Thomassinière, calling his servants. "Send away all visitors; I am not at home to anyone; if a gold ingot should be brought to me, I wouldn't accept it now."

The servants seemed embarrassed, as if they dared not reply. Meanwhile the noise continued, and they could distinguish a woman's voice crying:

"I will go in! I tell you I'm bound to go in!"

"Have that canaille turned out of doors, Lafleur," said Monsieur de la Thomassinière angrily.

At that moment the dining-room door was violently thrown open, and a woman of some sixty years, short and stout, with a good-humored face, dressed like an orange-woman, with a round cap on her head, bounced into the room.

“Hoity-toity!” she cried; “it’d be a pretty good one if I couldn’t get into my own son’s house! What a set of donkeys them fellows be! Excuse me, messieurs and mesdames. Where be you, Thomas? Why don’t you come and gimme a kiss, my boy? Don’t you know your old mother?”

The changes of scene at the Opéra are less rapid than those that took place in that dining-room upon Mère Thomas’s entrance. Monsieur de la Thomassinière was stupefied; it was as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt and was unable to move a muscle or utter a word. The resplendent Athalie turned pale, was evidently confused, and glanced at Mère Thomas with an expression indicating that she still doubted the truth of what she heard. On each guest’s face could be read the amazement caused by this unexpected scene, together with a touch of irony and malicious satisfaction, which fell far short, however, of what Destival and his wife felt at that moment.

Mère Thomas, who took no notice of the demeanor of the guests, recognized her son among the persons seated at the table, and ran to him, saying:

“There he is! I know him! That’s him—that’s my Thomas! Oh! it’s him fast enough—with his little mole under the left eye!—You ain’t changed so much, my boy.—Well, why don’t you kiss me? Can’t you move hand or foot?”

As she spoke, the good woman seized her son’s head and kissed him several times. La Thomassinière made

no resistance; he acted like a man who did not know where he was, while Athalie cried:

"Mon Dieu! is it possible? Isn't this a trick she's playing on us?"

"You didn't look to see me, my boy, eh? Ah! I should say not! This is a surprise, you see; one of your good friends, he writ to me as how it'd do you good to see your mother, and told me I'd better try to get here this very day, 'cos it's your wife's birthday."

At this point the guests looked at one another, trying to divine who it was who had arranged this surprise for Monsieur de la Thomassinière; and among those who were not responsible there were some who regretted that it had not suggested itself to them. As for the master of the feast, he was still too completely crushed by the blow that had been dealt him, to attend to what his mother said; and Athalie seemed to be on the point of swooning.

"So at that," continued Mère Thomas, "I says to myself, says I: 'Off we go!' I had a bit of money put by, and that paid for my seat in the diligence, where we was packed together as tight as herrings, saving your presence, messieurs and mesdames; and here I be in Paris, where you've feathered your nest so well!"

The Marquis de Cligneval, who was seated opposite Monsieur de la Thomassinière, determined to put an end to the embarrassment of his host, upon whose purse he drew too freely not to be ready to shut his eyes to the lowly condition of his parents. So he hastened to intervene, and observed pleasantly:

"It is really very amiable on your excellent mother's part to surprise you like this. She was in such haste that she came in rather a *négligé* costume. But what does it matter? you are among your friends. Pray let her sit

beside me; I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance. She has a most venerable face—a Greek profile. I am very fond of country people; they have such delightful dispositions.”

La Thomassinière looked at the marquis with an expression which signified: “You have saved my life!” while Mère Thomas exclaimed:

“What’s that he says—I came in *négligé*. But you’re wrong, my boy; I put on my Sunday best.”

“Hush! hush, mother, for heaven’s sake!” whispered La Thomassinière. “Be careful; you’re speaking to a marquis.”

“A what? What did you say, Thomas?—But I say, where’s my darter-in-law? Show her to me, my boy; wouldn’t she like to give her man’s mother a kiss?”

“Madame de la Thomassinière, pray embrace your mother-in-law,” said Madame Destival, with a mocking glance at Athalie.

“I can’t stand it any longer! I am dying!” murmured Athalie in an expiring voice; and she fell over upon Auguste, who was seated next her.

“My wife has fainted!” cried La Thomassinière, overjoyed by an incident which might divert the attention of the company; and he sprang to his feet and rushed toward his wife, who was already surrounded by several people.

“Oho! is that your wife, that bleating little minx?” exclaimed Mère Thomas. “She’s ate too much, my boy; she’s got the indigestion, sure enough. Just give her a drink of brandy—that’ll settle her stomach.”

Someone gave Athalie smelling salts; she was taken into the fresh air; but she was careful not to recover consciousness. Mère Thomas pushed away two *petites-mâitresses* who were aiding her daughter-in-law, saying:

"Look out, my little darlings, you're stifling the child. Bless me! if you want to bring her to right off, I know what'll do it; two or three slaps on the back-sides—that'll bring a woman to in short order; it never fails."

The ladies exchanged glances and moved away from Madame Thomas, saying to one another:

"This is shocking! it is getting to be unbearable."

"She amuses me immensely, my dear."

"For my part, she makes me blush; whenever she opens her mouth I tremble for fear that some disgusting remark will come out."

"She has begun well."

"This is a hysterical attack," said La Thomassinière; "madame must be taken to her room. They always last two or three hours, at least."

"Well, well! that's very nice!" said Mère Thomas.

The hostess was taken to her room, and she vowed to herself that she would not leave it so long as Madame Thomas should be in the house.

However, for most of the guests the dinner was the most essential thing, and Madame de la Thomassinière had no sooner been taken from the dining-room than they all resumed their places at the table, with such remarks as: "It won't amount to anything; it isn't dangerous." All of which meant: "We have paid enough attention to the hostess, who thought it best to faint; now let's think of our stomachs, and not neglect any longer the delicious dishes that have been prepared for us."

La Thomassinière would gladly have followed his wife; but he realized that it would be discourteous to leave his guests, with whom he had already changed his tone. So he returned to his seat, cudgelling his brain to devise a method of imposing silence on his dear mother.

Destival, meanwhile, fearing that Madame Thomas might be spirited away, offered her his hand to escort her to her seat by the marquis. Mère Thomas accepted his hand with a: "Thank 'ee, my man," and planted herself on a chair beside Monsieur de Cligneval.

"Now, my spark, I don't need your hand no more," she said to her escort; "when it comes to forks and teeth, I can go it alone, friend."

"She is overflowing with wit!" cried the marquis; "really, her repartees are delicious!"

La Thomassinière, who was afraid to raise his eyes, tried to hurry the dinner. But his guests did not support him; they were very comfortable at table and did full honor to the feast. The marquis stuffed Mère Thomas; he kept her plate constantly filled, hoping that that would stop her chatter; but she was a shrewd old girl, who could do two things at once. While she was eating, she kept repeating:

"Dieu! how good this is! What a fine *fricot*! I ain't never ate anything as tasted like this! I say, Thomas, my boy, we don't make such good fricassees to our little cabaret at the sign of the Learned Ass! Do you remember, boy?"

"Who wants some truffles? who hasn't any truffles?" cried Monsieur de la Thomassinière, trying to drown his mother's voice. But Madame Destival, who had heard every word, inquired:

"What do you say, madame? Did Monsieur de la Thomassinière ever keep a cabaret?"

"La Thomassinière!" echoed Mère Thomas, emptying her glass. "Who's that, my heart?"

"Your son, madame."

"What! don't you call yourself Thomas no more, my son? So that's what all them green monkeys stitched

with gold, in your outside room, meant when they said this wa'n't where you lived! What have you dropped your father's name for, Thomas? Didn't it sound good enough for you? Let me tell you he was an honest man, who sold wine for six sous a litre without putting any drugs in it, like your swindlers in Paris!—Excuse me, friends.”

“Monsieur your son calls himself La Thomassinière now,” said the marquis, “from the name of an estate that he has bought. That is the custom in Paris; he hasn't changed his name but he has lengthened it a little; it's pleasanter to the ear.”

“Yes, to be sure,” said La Thomassinière, trying to recover his self-assurance. “When one has made a fortune as *consequential* as mine, one is at liberty to forget. Besides, as monsieur le marquis says, it's done every day.”

“Oh! that makes a difference,” rejoined Mère Thomas, “if you've been a-buying estates. That's worse than the Marquis de Carabas. But for all that, my boy, you'd ought to sent for me to come to see you sooner; for I've been just a little bit homesick down to our place; it's a regular hole, and I couldn't have such a devil of a spree with the two hundred francs you send me every year.”

“Mon Dieu! how outrageous!” cried a lady wearing a cap adorned by a bird-of-paradise, pushing her chair away from the table; while the gentlemen glanced at one another, laughing, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière stretched his feet under the table trying to find those of his excellent mother, who sat opposite him, and to whom he vainly made signals to urge her to be quiet.

“What struck that party?” said Mère Thomas, staring at the lady in the cap. “Is she going to faint too? What's she making faces at me for, with that tail of a kite on her head?”

"Mother, I implore you!" said La Thomassinière, moving his feet frantically.

"Down! down, I say! there's dogs under the table, boy. Here's two or three on 'em running atween my legs. Tell someone to give 'em something to eat, so they'll leave us alone. Give me a drink! Who's going to fill my glass? you, old boy?"

It was the marquis to whom this question was addressed; he took a decanter of madeira that stood before him and filled the glass of his neighbor, who always refused to drink without touching glasses.

"What's this yellow wine, my boy?"

"Madeira, madame."

"Pretty good, eh?"

"Perfect! it's the best I ever drank."

"Here's your health then, my buck; and yours, old fox!"

The last remark was addressed to Madame Thomas's left hand neighbor, an old chevalier, with his hair curled and powdered in the style in vogue during the Regency, who seemed extremely ill-pleased to be seated beside Monsieur de la Thomassinière's mother. He turned his head whenever she looked at him, and did not answer when she spoke to him. This time Madame Thomas held her glass over the old fellow's plate, so that it was impossible for him to avoid replying, and he muttered disdainfully:

"I don't drink, madame."

"Ah! you don't drink, don't you, old bean-pole? Well then, you can go without, that's all. You needn't put on so many airs; you look as pleasant as a bad clove!—Your health, my son, and yours, messieurs, mesdames, and the whole company; and yours, too, you green monkey, as didn't want to let me in."

This compliment was aimed at Lafleur. Monsieur de la Thomassinière beat his brow in despair, while the marquis repeated till he was hoarse:

“Excellent! excellent! The old patriarchal custom—to drink everybody’s health. Noah’s children always touched one another’s glasses.”

Madame Thomas tossed off the glass of madeira at a swallow; but when she had drunk it, she made a wry face and glared at the marquis, crying:

“God! what vile stuff your madeira is! Bah! it tastes like a donkey’s water right in your mouth, my children!”

All the ladies cried out and hid their faces behind their napkins. The men laughed; and Madame Thomas, who saw nothing unnatural in what she had said and thought that they shared her amusement, caused her glass to be filled with another kind of wine; while her son sank back in his chair, muttering:

“I am a ruined man!”

The more Madame Thomas drank, the more loquacious she became. In vain did the marquis fill her plate, and Monsieur de la Thomassinière call to his servants: “Serve monsieur! Remove madame’s plate!” the stout old lady’s voice soared above those of all her fashionable neighbors, for people of fashion are not in the habit of speaking loud.

The old gentleman with the pigeon’s wings, whom Madame Thomas had called a clove, could not digest that insult; he scowled terribly, tried to turn his back on his neighbor, and muttered:

“It’s abominable to invite people like myself to compromise their dignity with such riff-raff! Gad! if they ever catch me here again! I am terribly distressed that I came.”

For all that, the old chevalier did not go away, but ate and drank for four, by way of compensation for the annoyance that he felt.

Mère Thomas wanted some of everything, she called for all the dishes that she saw, and she would say to the marquis:

“What’s that, my fine little fellow?”

“*Poulet à la Marengo, madame.*”

“My soul! how it’s disguised! Never mind, just pass me a wing.—And what’s that black stew over yonder?”

“A salmi of partridge *aux truffes*.”

“That must be heating; but give me a bit of your *salmigondis aux truffes*, I’ll take the chances.—and that big dish all covered over with sauce?”

“That’s a *Sultane à la Chantilly*.”

“A sultana! The dear boy! does he take us for Turks, I wonder! Just give me a taste of that too, so that I’ll know how those miserable dogs cook.”

“You’ll make yourself ill, Madame Thomas,” said La Thomassinière in an undertone, horrified to see his mother’s eyes grow brighter and brighter, and that she insisted on tasting all the wines as well as all the dishes.

“Get out, boy, I’ve got a stomach like an ostrich! Don’t you remember the bet I made one day with our cousin as kept the eating house? A fine man, he was! He died three year ago, poor Chahû!”

“Lafleur! Jasmin! Comtois! take these plates away; serve the dessert, I say!”

In vain did Monsieur de la Thomassinière shout to his servants—his mother continued her narrative none the less:

“You must know, my children, that Chahû was one of the biggest eaters in all Brie; he was a chap with a big head, and he’d put down a turkey, saving your presence,

just as slick as you or me'd swallow a lark. Bless my soul, if he didn't take a fancy one day to bet me that he'd eat more'n me of a rabbit stew I'd made for a mason's wedding feast. I'm a sly fox, so I took his bet; and when we'd got half through, I told him in confidence that it was cats as I'd stewed up; and at that my jackass turned up his toes and got rid of his dinner on the floor."

The ladies refused to listen to any more; they left the table and took refuge in the salon. Monsieur de la Thomassinière was beside himself; he turned red, yellow and lead-colored in turn; the perspiration stood on his brow; he poured wine in his plate and put his fork in his glass. The young men laughed heartily, Auguste with the rest, for he was of the opinion that his host well deserved this little lesson. Destival was radiant; his eyes sparkled with delight as he looked from one person to another and finally fastened his gaze on La Thomassinière. The Marquis de Cligneval looked at his host with an expression which signified: "Gad! I've done what I could; but, as you see, it's impossible to hold her back."

"Well! what makes all them pretty females go scooting off at once?" queried Mère Thomas; "be they all going to the closet together? I say, it's like the hens down our way: when one goes, the others have to follow."

A young poet, who had written some verses for Madame de la Thomassinière, and who was exceedingly annoyed because Mère Thomas's arrival, by causing Athalie to swoon and putting the ladies to flight, had prevented him from reciting his quatrain, which would, so he thought, create a sensation, said to the buxom dame, as he readjusted his collar:

"Madame, it is your fault in some degree that the Graces have fled from us."

"What's that you say, my little dapper?" retorted Mère Thomas, planting both elbows on the table, the better to observe the young man.

"I say, madame," replied the poet, "that the Graces are easily frightened, and that——"

"What's that you're singing about your Graces! Be they birds you're trying to tame?"

"Madame, the Graces are the ladies; the Zephyrs and the Loves fly at their heels; Pleasure and Laughter form their train and strew roses along their path."

"Phew! what sort of a stew is that, my boy, made out of roses and rice."¹

"I mean to imply, madame, that there are remarks at which modesty takes offence, and that, when telling stories, you should touch very lightly upon certain subjects, for

" ' Le Latin dans les mots brave l'honnêteté,
Mais l'auditeur Français veut être respecté !
Du moindre sens impur la liberté l'outrage
Si la pudeur des mots n'en adoucit l'image.' "²

Mère Thomas roared with laughter, and, turning to her neighbor with the pigeon's wings, who was dipping a macaroon in champagne, his face still wearing a scowl, she said:

"Do you understand that, old fox? That fellow says he's got impure senses; it ain't decent to make a confession like that at dessert."

"Ah! madame!" cried the poet, flushing with wrath, "no one ever dared——"

¹ *Ris*, meaning *laughter*, has the same pronunciation as *riz* (rice).

² The Latin tongue defies decency, but the French listener insists on being treated with respect. He is offended by the faintest touch of impurity of sense unless the image is softened by the decency of the words.

“What’s up, Biribi? Bah! you’re losing your temper, my lad, you’re red as a turkey-cock; I see that; but I’m a good-natured fool, and I ain’t got no more gall ’n a flea. Let’s drink together; that’s better’n talking about your fat women—grasses, Graces—and your thin women, what I don’t know nothing about. Some wine, marquis—that nice little wine as foams. Oh! I know what this is; it’s champagne, that’s what it is; it ain’t no fraud, like your madeira! Your health, my little duckies; yours, Thomas. Whatever’s the matter with you, my son? You don’t say nothing, and you look as queer as queer; be you going to go off the hooks, like your wife? We must have a song, children; that’s always the thing at dessert. Come! who’s going to be the one to begin? Thomas, you used to know lots o’ songs; I’m going to sing you the one Chahû’s wife sung to my wedding:

“ ‘J’entre en train quand il entre en train,
J’entre en train quand il entre—’ ”

You must sing the chorus, children.”

“One moment, one moment, madame,” said the marquis; “pray wait for the coffee and liqueurs.”

“Oh, yes! that’s so, my friend; they’ll clear my voice.”

“This is getting worse and worse!” said the marquis to his host in an undertone.

“Oh! monsieur le marquis, I am in utter despair; I am overwhelmed with confusion; I am afraid to turn my head!”

“Why, my dear fellow, I am not in the least offended; a great many people have mothers who are—who are not precisely noble. That does not prevent your being a man whom I esteem beyond measure, nor does it make your dinner any the less delicious. But there are people in

society who are not so sensible as I am, and in whose estimation this may do you an injury. To say nothing of the fact that our dear mamma is getting tipsy, and I don't know what she may not sing us before she is through."

"And to think that I expect more than eighty people to-night for the ball—the most fashionable and most distinguished people in Paris! Save me, monsieur le marquis; I lay my purse, my cash-box, my credit, at your feet!"

"My dear La Thomassinière, my friendship for you is a sufficient motive to—However, I believe that I have a note for six thousand francs to meet to-morrow."

"You will allow me to attend to that, monsieur le marquis."

"We must devise some way to make everybody leave the house."

"Yes, and as soon as possible."

"Wait—I have an idea—Yes, on my word, it's an excellent idea."

"Ah! monsieur le marquis! my gratitude——"

"It may cost you rather dear, but I see no other resource."

"I am ready to make every possible sacrifice."

"Very good; let me set to work. Go back to the table as if nothing were in the wind. Tell your servants to carry out my orders, and await their effect."

"Lafleur, Jasmin, Comtois, obey monsieur le marquis rather than myself."

The marquis left the dining-room, followed by the servants, and La Thomassinière returned to the table. Coffee and liqueurs were served. The marquis soon reappeared and resumed his seat beside Madame Thomas, reassuring his host with a glance.

Mère Thomas hummed as she drank her coffee.

"My children," she said, "we must have a dance to-night; I feel twenty year younger. Thomas, you'll take a turn, I hope? Give me a glass, marquis; but none of that sugary stuff that sticks in your gullet. Give me something stiff and strong, my friend; that's the only kind that makes you feel good."

Madame Thomas had taken two petits verres of brandy, one of rum and one of kirsch; she was declaring that they were very refreshing, and seemed disposed to go on drinking, when a cloud of smoke arose in the courtyard and found its way into the rooms. The guests looked at each other uneasily.

"Seems to me there's a bit of a fog," said Mère Thomas; "it smells like something burning; be any of you sitting on a foot-warmer?"

The servants rushed into the room, shouting in dismay: "The house is on fire!"

"Fire!" cried all the guests, springing from their chairs. Mère Thomas alone remained seated.

"Well! all you got to do is fling water on it!" she said.

"My house on fire!" said Monsieur de la Thomasinière, glancing at the marquis. "How can it have happened? Ah! there was a pile of straw—somebody must have dropped a match on it. Look, monsieur, see what a smoke there is in the courtyard!"

As it was about nine o'clock in the evening, the flame made by a number of bunches of straw, which the marquis had fired, made the courtyard as light as day. The cry of *fire!* soon arose on all sides; it reached the salon, and the ladies who had taken refuge there from the society of Madame Thomas, rushed out shrieking, and calling their fathers or their husbands.

The gentlemen tried to allay their fears, saying: "It's nothing, it won't amount to anything; but we must go as soon as possible. Get your bonnets and shawls; make haste, for ladies should never stay where everything is in confusion. We will go with you."

Meanwhile the fire which the marquis had kindled, in order to put the guests to flight, and which the servants did not think of putting out, because they knew that it was a ruse on their master's part,—the fire actually attacked the carriage-house and spread from that to the stable. While the ladies went to get their shawls and the men their hats, and while the servants ran through the rooms shouting *fire!* the danger had become real, and no one discovered it until a large part of the courtyard was already wrapped in flames.

Thereupon tumult and confusion held full sway; the ladies fled into the street; one lost her turban, another her cap, and several fainted. Auguste took Athalie in his arms and carried her to a stone bench in the next street. Amid the general upheaval, Mère Thomas decided at last to leave the table; she raised her skirts above her knees and began to run, crying out:

"Just look at all them friends of Thomas's! the cowardly skunks are running away instead of forming a line! and they'd leave me here to roast just like a chestnut!"

The results of the marquis's little ruse were one wing of the house burned, four horses burned, three firemen injured, ten shawls lost, fifteen hats stolen, six locks of hair scorched, three bracelets lost, and two combs broken; but Monsieur de la Thomassinière made himself whole with twenty thousand francs, and at all events his worthy mother did not exhibit herself to the numerous guests who were invited for the evening.

XV

THAT WHICH WAS FORESEEN

On the morrow of the scene at his house, Monsieur de la Thomassinière and Athalie started for England, where they determined to remain until Paris had forgotten the scandal caused by the stout countrywoman. As for the latter, they had sent her back post haste to her village, expressly forbidding her ever to leave it again, on pain of withdrawal of the allowance of two hundred francs which her generous son deigned to pay her.

The absurd false shame of La Thomassinière, who blushed for his mother after he became wealthy, and the petty baseness of Athalie, who had pretended to faint in order to avoid embracing Mère Thomas, made Auguste quite indifferent to their departure; but their house was the only place where he saw Monsieur de Cligneval, and Bertrand said more than once:

"Seems to me, lieutenant, that we don't hear much about that marquis who owes you a hundred louis."

"Perhaps I shall hear from him to-day."

"And the little milkmaid, when are we going to see her again, and thank her for what she brought you? The chickens were fine! I had to eat them while you were dining out."

"I don't think that Denise gives very much thought to us. Hasn't she a lover? Isn't she to be married?"

"Is that a reason for not thanking her for her chickens, lieutenant?"

"Perhaps she came to Paris to invite me to her wedding."

"I don't know what she came for; but she seemed unhappy when she went away. She said she wouldn't trouble you any more, and I saw tears in her eyes. That touched me, I admit; the child is so sweet and pretty, and anyone can see that her tears ain't make-believe."

Auguste was apparently reflecting on what the ex-corporal had said, when there was a violent ring at the door, and Bertrand announced that an old gentleman whose face denoted intense excitement, wished to see Monsieur Dalville. Auguste was surprised to recognize Monsieur Monin, whose eyes, even more staring than usual, seemed to indicate that something of grave importance had happened.

"Is it you, Monsieur Monin?" said Auguste, offering a chair to the ex-druggist, who, despite his excitement, inquired as he seated himself:

"How's the state of your health?"

"I ought rather to ask you that, Monsieur Monin. You look as if you were in some trouble; may I know what it is?"

"Yes, monsieur; I have less than I had! that's why I've come."

"What do you say? less than you had? I don't understand."

"Do you mean to say you don't know it?"

"Know what, Monsieur Monin?"

"What I just told you."

"Not yet; but if you would be good enough to explain——"

"The fact is, monsieur, it gave me such a blow!"

"Indeed, you seem to be a little confused."

"Didn't it have the same effect on you?"

"I don't know as yet what effect it will have on me, Monsieur Monin, or how I am interested in what you came to tell me."

"Oh! Monsieur Dalville, if we could have guessed; if we could have foreseen! But, bless my soul! we aren't sorcerers; that's what I told Bichette this morning when she insisted on taking my snuff-box away."

"I never supposed that you were a sorcerer, Monsieur Monin; but I confess that at this moment I find you rather incomprehensible."

"That's because I haven't recovered yet, monsieur."

"Recovered from what?"

"And Bichette declares that he's taken you in, too."

Dalville lost patience, and glanced at Bertrand, who was pacing the floor, muttering:

"If I had a squad of men like him to drill, I'd begin by fastening 'em to horses' tails and driving the horses at a gallop."

Monin took out his snuff-box, stuffed his nostrils, and continued:

"I have come to you, Monsieur Dalville, to see if by chance you have discovered which way he has gone."

"Who on earth do you mean, Monsieur Monin? For heaven's sake, explain yourself more fully! You have been talking to me for an hour, and I haven't understood a word that you've said. What is it that someone has been doing to you?"

"Someone has robbed me, monsieur!"

"Robbed you?"

"That is to say, carried off twenty-five thousand francs."

"Who, pray?"

"Monsieur Destival."

"Destival!"

"Yes, monsieur; he's gone away, left France, so I am told. That is what I had the honor to come to tell you."

Auguste understood now too well; he was overwhelmed. Bertrand walked up to Monin, shouting:

"What's that you say? Damnation! Is it possible that that Monsieur Destival——"

"Ah! Monsieur Bertrand! How's the state of your health?"

"He has gone—with our two hundred and fifty thousand francs!"

"Just so. You know you taught him to drill."

"Ah! the double-dyed villain!—We are ruined, lieutenant!"

"Don't get excited, Bertrand; perhaps this intelligence is false. I can't believe that Destival——"

"That's what I told Bichette; I couldn't believe it either."

"But how do you know? Who told you that Destival has gone?"

"I'll tell you, monsieur: he sold my shop for me not long ago, and kept the money to invest; and I gave him six thousand francs more a week ago, because he said that the more he had, the better investments he could make. And yet Bichette wasn't very much inclined to leave our money with him. But Monsieur Bisbis advised her to leave it, so—Do you take snuff?"

"I must go at once to Destival's," said Auguste, interrupting Monin in the middle of his speech.

"Yes, lieutenant," said Bertrand, "that will be much better than listening to monsieur. Go, don't lose any time; and meanwhile I'll go and try to find out something about which way the villain has gone. Perhaps he ain't far away yet, and if we have to founder ten horses, we'll catch him!"

"If you do catch him, Monsieur Bertrand, remember that I'm in for twenty-five thousand francs," said Monin. But nobody was listening to him; Auguste was already on the staircase and the corporal lost no time in following him. Monin, finding that he was left alone with the little groom, decided to leave Dalville's abode and to return to his own.

"At the rate they're going," he thought, "there's no doubt that those gentlemen will succeed in catching our man; so I'll go home and encourage Bichette."

Auguste betook himself to the business agent's abode. He inquired for Destival of the concierge, who replied:

"Monsieur Destival hasn't been seen for three days, and nobody knows what's become of him; he didn't say where he was going. The negro and Baptiste have gone, too; but madame and her maid stayed behind. She's at home now."

Auguste went upstairs and was admitted by Julie. The young man noticed no change in the apartments, where it simply seemed more quiet than before. He was ushered into the presence of madame, who seemed a little embarrassed at sight of him.

"Can it be that the current report is true, madame?" Auguste asked. "I am told that your husband has gone away, that he has left France!"

"Alas! it is only too true, monsieur," replied Emilie, sinking into an easy-chair.

"What, madame! has he gone, not to return?"

"I think so, monsieur. He has abandoned me; he is an abominable man!"

"And do you know what he has taken with him, madame?"

"No, monsieur; I knew absolutely nothing about his business."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand francs! It is almost all that I possessed."

"Oh! that was shocking on his part!"

"Say rather that it is robbery, infernal rascality!" cried Auguste, angered by Madame Destival's indifference. "And you don't know, madame, where he has gone?"

"I know nothing at all about it, monsieur; I am overwhelmed, stunned, like yourself!"

"Your husband has ruined me, madame."

"I am terribly distressed, monsieur; but what do you expect me to do?"

"It seems to me, madame, that this occurrence is likely to involve you in some unpleasantness."

"I have no responsibility whatever to Monsieur Destival's creditors, monsieur; we had each our own property; this house is hired in my name, and everything in it is mine. Is it my fault that Monsieur Destival has been unfortunate in his speculations? Is it the first time that such a thing ever happened? Am I not more to be pitied than anybody else? He has carried off my marriage portion, monsieur, and the furniture that is left here is certainly not worth the amount of that. —However, monsieur, do whatever you choose; proceed against me; turn me into the street if such is your desire!"

Auguste made no reply, but left Madame Destival's presence abruptly, cursing the business agent's rascality.

Bertrand returned, having failed to discover any traces of the fugitive. He continued his efforts in that direction for three days, while Auguste on his side did all that he could; but it seemed certain that Destival was already outside of France; that was the utmost that he could learn about him.

Auguste tried to recover his cheerfulness and to endure the blow philosophically. Bertrand was very careful not to offer his master any counsel at that moment, for he realized that the time would be ill-chosen. But when all hope was abandoned of discovering the tracks of the swindler who had carried off Dalville's fortune, Bertrand bethought himself of the Marquis de Cligneval's little debt; and Auguste consented that the corporal should call upon him.

Bertrand hastened to the address given him and asked for monsieur le marquis.

"He don't live here now," said the concierge.

"Where does he live?"

"He's gone to take the waters."

"What waters, morbleu?"

"Faith, he didn't tell me, monsieur."

Bertrand was furious; he returned, cursing, to tell Auguste, who received the news calmly enough.

"What! lieutenant, you are robbed of a hundred louis more, and it doesn't make you angry!" said Bertrand.

"Faith, my friend, when a fellow is ruined, a hundred louis more or less aren't worth worrying about."

"Still, they'd tide over for some time. That cursed marquis! I had a presentiment of this."

"I shall find him somewhere."

"He won't pay you."

"Bertrand, you must look into the condition of my cash-box and see how much I have left."

"That won't take long, lieutenant."

Bertrand walked sadly toward the desk; then returned and presented with a sigh a statement of their finances.

"Eighteen thousand six hundred and forty francs," said Auguste, reading the total; "Gad! I didn't think that I was still so rich as this."

"I haven't counted the marquis's hundred louis, nor what several of your friends owe you."

"I am inclined to think that that is wise. But I must know what I owe also; send to my tailor and boot-maker and harness-maker, and pay their bills. When I was rich I could afford to owe; but when one's money is gone, one should not think of running into debt."

"You speak like the great Turenne, lieutenant. All the bills shall be paid to-morrow."

After the bills were paid, Auguste possessed sixteen thousand four hundred francs.

"Add to that our handsome furniture and the wine in the cellar, and by leading an orderly, economical life, you can wait to see what will turn up," Bertrand observed.

"We must subtract from the total, Bertrand, three hundred francs that I have promised to pay for a pretty mercer's apprentice, whose furniture a heartless bailiff proposed to seize; two hundred francs which I am lending to Virginie, and ten louis for some bracelets that I am going to buy to-night."

Bertrand nearly swallowed the pen that he had in his mouth.

"You can't mean it, lieutenant!" he cried; "before long you won't have anything left."

"Look you, my friend, I promised all these things when I was still rich; shall I break my promises just because a villain has ruined me? You wouldn't do it yourself. But I swear that these shall be my last follies. Henceforth I propose to be virtue itself; besides, you must remember that we shall also have the proceeds of the sale of my two horses and my cabriolet, for I can no longer indulge in a carriage! I must cut down my establishment, dismiss Tony, and go on foot.—Does that make you feel sad, Bertrand?"

"For your sake, lieutenant!"

"Oh! very likely I shall be all the better for it, my friend. Exercise is essential to good health—I've heard you say that a thousand times. Do you think that people who go on foot aren't just as good as those who ride in carriages?"

"Oh! you don't think I'm such a fool as that, lieutenant!"

"Well then, why regret a thing one can do so well without! With money, hasn't one always a cab at his command, without having horses and a groom to keep? Upon my word, I can't understand now why I ever had a cabriolet."

"But all those grisettes who come to tell you about their little troubles, to have you comfort them, and the great ladies whose heads you turned—don't you think, lieutenant, that your cabriolet had something to do with their display of affection for you?"

"That would be an additional reason for not regretting it. Henceforth I shall know the hearts of the women to whom I make love; I shall be sure of being loved for myself; and if I triumph over a youthful beauty, if I carry the day over a rival, I shall have no reason to fear that I owe the preference accorded me to my fortune and to that alone."

"You will soon find out, lieutenant, that it was for your advantage that that villain carried off your money!"

"Faith! who knows? Tell me, am I wrong to look at the bright side?"

"No, indeed; there are lots of people who couldn't find a bright side to such a thing; but still—excuse my fears, monsieur—what you have left won't last forever, no matter how much we may economize; and what will

you do then, lieutenant? for a man can't live on his cheerfulness alone."

"Why, then—we'll see, my dear Bertrand; I have some talents—well, I'll turn them to account, I'll work."

"You work, monsieur!" said Bertrand, turning his back, to wipe away a tear.

"Why not, my friend?"

"Because you're not used to it—because it would be too hard for you—because I wouldn't allow it, in fact,—and—But let's not say any more about that. You're right; it's better to forget ourselves. Who knows? perhaps we shall find your thief!"

"That's the talk, my dear Bertrand; we must always hope; it makes us none the poorer and it does us good."

Auguste went out to seek distraction with a mercer's apprentice, and Bertrand went downstairs to read the life of the great Turenne to Schtrack.

XVI

A SCENE IN SOCIETY

The cabriolet was sold, the little groom found another place. When Madame Saint-Edmond observed that her neighbor was cutting down his establishment, she no longer deigned to look at him, but passed him without even bowing to him. Bertrand was indignant at her discourtesy, but Auguste laughed at it, saying:

"I am certain now that that woman never loved me, and it is always pleasant to know whom one is dealing with."

But Bertrand muttered :

“Just let her lose her poodle again ; and if I find him I’ll make him do a turn of sentry duty that he’ll never be relieved from.”

Auguste continued to seek distraction in society, and as distraction is ordinarily expensive, he spent much more than he should have done, although he had determined to be virtuous and orderly. He considered himself very prudent, because, instead of losing fifty louis at an evening party, he lost only fifty crowns ; because, instead of hiring a box at the theatre, he contented himself with buying seat tickets at the office ; and because he rode in cabs instead of keeping a cabriolet. But even this outlay was too large for a person who had only a small capital and no income. Bertrand saw with dismay that their funds would not last as long as he had hoped ; he dared not remonstrate with Auguste, but he often said to him :

“Let’s go see the pretty milkmaid, monsieur, and that little Coco that you’re so fond of ; that will divert you. We can pass a few days at the village, and amusements don’t cost so much there as they do in Paris.”

Auguste constantly postponed visiting Montfermeil. He did not tell Bertrand the reason that he dreaded to go there ; but he was pained to think that he was no longer able to do all that he had hoped to do for the child ; he supposed that the money which he had left for him had been used ; and, being accustomed to follow nothing but the impulses of his heart and give money away with a lavish hand, he sighed at the idea of being obliged to reckon the extent of his benefactions. That pang was the keenest that the loss of his fortune had as yet caused him.

After an absence of six weeks, Monsieur and Madame de la Thomassinière returned to Paris. Their

mansion became once more the rendezvous of the people who love good dinners, evening parties and balls; and the old chevalier of the pigeon's wings was not the last to return thither, although at their last dinner-party he had sworn that they would never catch him there again. The marquises and dandies, the women of fashion, the poets and bankers were very careful not to mention Madame Thomas to Monsieur de la Thomassinière; and he said to himself, rubbing his hands:

"It's all forgotten, nobody thinks about it now, it hasn't injured me in the least. For all that, I did well to pass six weeks in England; that sufficed to forget it."

Monsieur de la Thomassinière was mistaken; Madame Thomas's visit was not forgotten; but so long as he was rich and continued to give gorgeous parties and grand dinners, people would continue to go to his house and to welcome him warmly. Let him but lose his money, and everybody would very soon discover what he was—a very stupid, vulgar individual. So that it was not necessary for him to make the journey to England. To be sure, he did not say all this to himself.

Destival's flight caused a sensation. When it was mentioned to La Thomassinière, he cried:

"I was certain that that man would turn out ill! He fancied that he was as well equipped as I; he had the assurance to dream of making a fortune like mine! As if my talents were given to everybody! He gave wretched dinners: poor food and poor wine! And he had an idea that he gave dinners like mine! I have said a hundred times: 'That man will go under!' and he hasn't failed to do it."

"His wife was too much of a flirt," said Athalie; "she insisted on following all the fashions and wearing cashmere shawls; she had taken my dressmaker."

"Taken your dressmaker, madame!" cried her husband; "you must agree that that was utterly absurd! Those people had lost their senses! The idea of taking your dressmaker! the wife of a miserable little business agent!"

"But she's still in Paris," said the Marquis de Cligneval, who was present at this conversation. "I saw her in a buggy a few days ago, more stylishly dressed than ever."

"Really?" said the speculator; "you say that she was dressed in style? It's a fact that she had much more wit than her husband! It seems that her skirts are entirely clear of his business; she must have taken measures beforehand, and she did well; certainly no one can blame her."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Dalville, who had not been at the Thomassinière's since their return from England.

"Ah! Monsieur Dalville!" said the speculator, hurrying to meet the young man with an air of great cordiality, while the marquis seized Auguste's hand and cried:

"How delighted I am to see you, my amiable friend! Gad! I intended to come to see you one of these days.—'Nobody ever sees him now,' I said to myself; 'what in the deuce has become of him?'"

"It is a fact, monsieur," said Athalie, with a gracious smile to Auguste, "you have been in no hurry, monsieur, to come to see us since we returned more than ten days ago; it's very unkind, for you know how fond of you we are."

"You are too kind, madame," said Auguste, taking a seat beside the *petite-maitresse*; "but I have been very much occupied. You have learned no doubt that Des-tival——"

"We were speaking about him a moment ago," said La Thomassinière, "and I was saying to monsieur le marquis, my good friend, that his performance did not surprise me in the least! Indeed, I believe that I anticipated it!"

"That is true—you did say that to me," the marquis replied; "but I admit that such things always pass my comprehension. To fail—to run away with other people's money—why, it's shocking! Let a man go off with his own all he pleases; but the idea of deceiving people who have confidence in one's good faith! who place their property in one's hands to administer! who leave everything to one's honesty! Ah! I could never forgive that!"

"Nor I," cried La Thomassinière; "I could never forgive anyone for not succeeding in business. I will say more—I won't receive such a man in my house. The minute your credit begins to sink, why, good-evening; you'd better stay at home! That's all I know! For we must have honesty first of all, as monsieur le marquis observed; and with rich people a man is never in any danger."

Dalville smiled at the warmth with which the two worthies emphasized their love of honesty, and after a moment he rejoined:

"Do you know how much of my money Destival has taken away with him?"

"No," said La Thomassinière; "is it possible that he cheated you too? I thought that you were too shrewd to allow yourself to be taken in, Monsieur Dalville!"

"Oh! in money matters, monsieur, the shrewdest are likely to be the stupidest. A man doesn't need intelligence to grow rich; that's a truth of which the world presents us with proofs every day."

"Monsieur Dalville is forever joking," Athalie said, laughingly; while La Thomassinière said to the marquis in an undertone:

"This young man knows nothing whatever about business. I feel sorry for him."

"How much did the scoundrel rob you of?" queried the marquis.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"The deuce!" cried La Thomassinière; "but that's quite a sum of money! Two hundred and fifty thousand francs! You must have stout loins to stand such a loss!"

"Oh well! I stand it as best I can. This is the time to be philosophical."

"I understand; that means that you are still very rich."

"Not at all; on the contrary, I have nothing left. Destival has carried off my capital, and in a few months I shall have to turn my attention to earning my living."

Monsieur de la Thomassinière's face grew long and the marquis's anxious. Athalie alone seemed to take any interest in Auguste's situation.

"What!" she exclaimed; "do you really mean, Monsieur Dalville, that that wretched man has ruined you?"

"Yes, madame, the fact is only too certain."

"And you take it as calmly as this?"

"If I should rage and tear my hair, that would not give me back my money."

"Philosophy is a fine thing, that is sure," said the marquis. "It helps us to take things as they come, it makes us superior to adversity, and—But it occurs to me that I am invited out to dinner, to eat a truffled turkey. I promised to be on hand at the overture, and a man of honor has only his word. *Au revoir*, my dear friends."

The marquis rose and was about to leave the room, when Dalville ran after him and stopped him.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Monsieur de Cligneval," he said under his breath, "but you probably have forgotten a little debt of a hundred louis. If I venture to remind you of it, you will understand that just at this time I am in need of whatever I possess."

"My dear friend, what do you say? Pardieu! it had slipped my mind entirely."

"You were to repay it that same week, and as it was two months ago, I thought you had forgotten that trifle."

"Entirely, my dear friend, entirely; I have no memory except for important things, and a hundred louis, you will agree, is the merest bagatelle. Send to my house."

"They could not give me your address at your former residence."

"True, I am on the wing. I will send the money to you—that will be the better way. But they are waiting for me; the turkey is probably served. It's a party of gentlemen only, and I promised to be prompt. I am very particular about keeping my word."

"I can rely, then, upon——"

"Yes, you shall hear from me to-morrow at the latest. Adieu; pardon me for leaving you so abruptly, but a truffled turkey admits of no postponement."

And Monsieur de Cligneval, who was in truth very particular about keeping his word when a dinner or luncheon was concerned, shook off his creditor and escaped from the salon. But as he was by no means anxious to meet Dalville frequently at his friend La Thomassinière's, monsieur le marquis, when he reached the reception-room, told a servant to go to his master and tell him privately that Monsieur de Cligneval had something to impart to him in confidence.

The servant did the errand and La Thomassinière hastily left the salon and joined the marquis, whose obsequious servant he deemed himself very fortunate to be.

"What is it, my dear marquis? I am at your service," cried the parvenu.

"Sh! let us go into your study, my friend. Dalville thinks that I have gone, and I don't want him to meet me when he goes away."

They went into Monsieur de la Thomassinière's study, and there the marquis seemed to hesitate, as if he did not know whether he ought to speak.

"I am dreadfully perplexed," he said at last to La Thomassinière, who was waiting humbly to hear what he had to tell him.

"Perplexed!—you! Is it possible that a marquis can ever be perplexed? Nonsense, you are joking!"

"No, my friend, no. Mon Dieu! because one happens to have been born in an exalted sphere, because one enjoys some consideration and has some little power, do you suppose that one is not human just the same, and subject to all the weaknesses that nature has allotted to us?"

"Surely not, monsieur le marquis! and——"

"Bless my soul! we are all very much alike! In the eyes of men of intelligence what does a little more or a little less nobility amount to?—For my own part, I give you my word that, if you were a duke, I should esteem you no more highly!"

"You are too kind, monsieur le marquis!"

"No, I am frank, that's all."

La Thomassinière was wondering how this discussion would take the marquis to the truffled turkey that awaited him, when Monsieur de Cligneval resumed:

"It was about Dalville that I wanted to speak to you in private. That young man allowed himself to be taken in like an idiot."

"Like an absolute idiot, monsieur le marquis."

"And he was so conceited, so self-sufficient! He wouldn't take anybody's advice; he thought that he knew how to manage his business. It was a pitiable thing!"

"It was, as you say, pitiable."

"The idea of entrusting all his money to Destival! He must have lost his senses."

"However that may be, monsieur le marquis, I always come back to my principle—I never forgive a man for allowing himself to be robbed."

"And you are quite right. Let him rob others—that is to say, make sport of others—and I've not a word to say; that is cleverness, tact!—However, this Dalville is in a most infernal position!"

"That's what I thought as soon as he told me he had nothing left."

"If he even had any social rank—a title—any of those things that may lead to everything."

"In short, if he were noble."

"Oh! in that case he might get out of it—but when a man isn't noble it's essential that he should be rich!"

"To be sure—that's another of my principles."

"And it's all a part of the system of equality and philosophy that I was describing to you just now. I was interested in this Dalville; but my friendship for you takes precedence of everything; that is why I conceive it to be my duty not to conceal anything from you."

"Conceal nothing, I pray, monsieur le marquis!"

"Do you know what he said to me just now when I was leaving the salon?"

"No, I haven't any idea."

"Didn't you overhear a word?"

"Not a single word."

"Well, my dear fellow, he was asking me to lend him money."

"Asking you to lend him money?"

"Yes, my dear fellow; on my word, that did seem a little bit hasty on his part, I admit."

"Hasty! you are very generous, monsieur le marquis! It was much worse than that."

"In the first place, I don't know him well enough to——"

"And even if you did know him very well—whoever heard of lending money to a man who is ruined, and who has just told you so?—I know him better than you do, and I wouldn't lend him."

"In the second place, it's the very worst form to borrow money at a third person's house."

"It's shocking form!"

"As if he couldn't have come to my house like a man—or waited till another time! But no—he attacks me in your salon! I had to promise to make him a loan—otherwise he wouldn't have let me go."

"That is true, I noticed that; and yet you had told him that a truffled turkey was awaiting you, and it seems to me that such a consideration should have imposed silence on him."

"You must realize that if he sets about borrowing money in this way from everybody he meets at your house, you will be placed in a false position, and a great many of your acquaintances will be kept away from here; for I don't know of anything that people dread more in society than to be asked to lend money."

"Great heaven!" cried La Thomassinière, pacing the floor excitedly. "Why, a man like that would be a

veritable scourge, worse than the plague! I believe that I should prefer to see Madame Thomas appear!"

"I assure you, my friend, that that would do you less harm."

"Never fear, I will attend to his case. And I won't beat about the bush either. To-morrow my concierge will receive my orders: we shall never be at home to Monsieur Dalville. You hear—*never!*"

"Do just what you think best, my friend. I am very sorry for the young man, for I liked him much. Still, I felt bound to let you know."

"Oh! you have done me a very great service, monsieur le marquis! A service that I shall never forget as long as I live! Think of receiving under my roof a man who tries to borrow money from my friends! who might end by trying to borrow from me! Remember that he has only been ruined a few days, and if he is borrowing already, what will be do after a little while? Can anyone tell where it will stop?"

"I have warned you, I have done what honor demanded, and now I will go and say a word to the turkey I have mentioned. Adieu, my friend."

"I hope that you will dine with us to-morrow, monsieur le marquis. You will not meet Dalville in my house, I assure you."

"In that case, I will join you. You will understand that it is painful to close one's purse to misfortune; but with the best will in the world, one can give only what one has. Until to-morrow then, my dear La Thomassinière."

"Your very humble servant, monsieur le marquis."

When the marquis had gone, La Thomassinière considered whether he should return to the salon. He decided to join Dalville—indeed he considered it his duty

to begin to treat him coolly, so that the young man would not be tempted to disregard the orders which he proposed to give to his concierge.

Dalville had remained with Athalie. That young lady, after compassionating the young man, and assuring him that she was grieved by his misfortune, remembered that a new play was to be given at the Français that evening, and she exclaimed:

"I must not fail to be there. Have you hired a box, Monsieur Auguste?"

"I no longer hire boxes, madame," was the reply; "I purchase my ticket modestly at the box-office. Sometimes I even stand in the line, and do not indulge myself with a seat in the resplendent orchestra."

"Stand in the line!" said Athalie; and her smile became less expansive. "Oh! how shocking!"

A minute or two later the young coquette noticed that there were several spots of mud on Dalville's boots.

"How is this, monsieur? You, who are always so exquisitely shod—you must have been splashed to-day! I can hardly believe it is you."

"Still another result of my penury, madame. When I had a cabriolet, it was a simple matter for me always to have my boots spotlessly clean; but when one goes on foot, one must expect to be more open to criticism in one's dress."

"What! you no longer have a cabriolet?"

"No, madame, I have mustered it out of service, as well as my groom, and I have kept only my faithful Bertrand; for he is a friend rather than a servant, and one doesn't part with a friend just because one is unfortunate."

"What's that? why, what you say is very true," replied Athalie, going to a mirror to arrange her curls.

"Bless my soul! how pale I am to-day! It frightens me! I am going to have one of my nervous attacks, I feel sure."

It was at that moment that Monsieur de la Thomassinière entered the salon, assuming a more self-important air, a heavier tread than usual, and with a frown already prepared, lest his visitor should ask him for a loan.

"Who on earth was it who desired to see you, monsieur?" queried Athalie, still looking at herself in the mirror.

"A person who had some very important information to communicate, madame, and who preferred not to come in, knowing that I had company; indeed, it is a nuisance to have company all the time, and I propose to adopt the plan of not receiving visitors when I am at home."

"Parbleu! you can do better than that, Monsieur de la Thomassinière," said Auguste, laughingly. "You should imitate a lady of my acquaintance, who, when she had not put on her red paint and white paint and blue paint—in a word, when she had not finished beautifying herself—used to go to the door herself and say: 'I am not at home.'"

"Ha! ha! that is very good!" said Athalie; "but I feel rather uncomfortable, and I believe that I will go and lie down."

The petite-maîtresse left the room with a slight nod to Auguste, while La Thomassinière continued to pace the floor, frowning ominously.

"Well, Monsieur de la Thomassinière, how's business?" said the young man, leaning back in his chair, while the parvenu seemed not to know what to do with himself.

"Business, monsieur? Oh! you mean speculation."

"Are you still making money fast?"

"Yes, monsieur; a man ought to make money, it's a duty, it's what we were made for."

"Parbleu! then you must teach me your secret, for I have never known how to do anything but spend it. But I must mend my ways; I must turn my attention to making my living, and for that purpose it seems to me that I cannot apply to a better man than you."

La Thomassinière, convinced that Auguste was leading up to a request for a loan, pretended that he had not heard, and said, with a glance at his wallet:

"I lack thirty thousand francs of the amount necessary to buy some notes that have just been offered me—a splendid chance. I know that I can obtain that amount easily enough, that I have only to open my mouth and mention my name; but it annoys me, because I can't endure to have recourse to anyone, even though it is only for an hour."

Auguste was diverted by this comedy, and said after a while:

"By the way, Monsieur de la Thomassinière, how is your good mother, the excellent Madame Thomas, whose unexpected arrival caused you so much pleasure the last time that I dined with you?"

The parvenu blushed, bit his lips and stammered:

"She's—she's very well, monsieur; that is to say, I presume she's very well; but since I returned from England—why,—why, of course I've had other things to think about. And—Great heaven! it just occurs to me—I've three letters to write to London—to noblemen who are expecting to hear from me—thoughtless creature that I am! I cannot stay with you any longer, Monsieur Dalville; my business calls me away—and business before everything."

With that, La Thomassinière abruptly left the salon, without saluting Auguste, whom he left there alone.

"The stupid ass!" said Dalville, as he took his hat; "does he suppose that I didn't notice the change in his manner as soon as he knew that I was a ruined man? And Athalie! I thought that she had more feeling! But what can one expect from a woman to whom dress and pleasure are everything? And such is this 'society,' where everyone seeks to shine, whose suffrage is eagerly sought, and in which we pass a great part of our lives! Are all these people worth the trouble of wasting a regret on them, I wonder?"

And Dalville left La Thomassinière's house, vowing that he would never go there again.

XVII

THE FIFTH FLOOR

"Lieutenant," said Bertrand to Dalville, one morning, "we have forgotten something in our reformation, but the approach of rent-day reminds me of it: it's the matter of lodgings. You must agree, lieutenant, that a fifteen-hundred franc suite is rather too heavy for our budget, in which the expense account is always lengthening, while the receipt account is a blank page."

"You are right, Bertrand, we must give notice."

"When I mentioned the subject to Schtrack yesterday, he told me that there's an Englishman who will take the apartments at any time if we want to leave them; it seems to me, lieutenant, that it would be the wisest plan to move right away."

"Do what you choose, Bertrand."

"Especially as there's a small bachelor's apartment on the fifth floor, that might suit us: two rooms and a large dressing-room. It's vacant, and if it won't be unpleasant for you to stay in this house——"

"Why should it? Have I any reason to blush because of my changed fortune? I am the dupe of villains, but I have made no dupes. We will go up four flights. Hire the bachelor's apartment."

"Very good, lieutenant. We will be all settled there to-morrow. No wagons to pay for moving—that's another saving."

Bertrand was well pleased to stay in the house with his friend Schtrack; and the next morning, as soon as Dalville had gone out, he and the concierge carried the furniture from the first floor to the fifth. But as two small rooms would not contain the furniture that filled six large ones, he left in the old apartment all that he considered superfluous, and the new tenant purchased it, the proceeds serving to restock Bertrand's cash-box at an opportune moment.

On returning home, Auguste, from long habit, stopped on the first floor. He rang, and waited in vain for Bertrand to admit him; then he remembered that he no longer lived there, and went on upstairs; but, in spite of himself, a sigh escaped him as he left his former apartment behind; and when he entered his new abode, the cramped space and the prospect of roofs from all the windows, extorted another sigh from his breast. We are men before we are philosophers, and the knowledge that we owe to the arguments of reason does not win an easy victory over our natural inclinations.

However, Auguste did his best to smile when Bertrand said to him:

"We shall be very comfortable here, lieutenant; shan't we? The rooms are small, but we have everything under our hand. And what's the use of having so many useless rooms? For, now that we're not rich any more, almost nobody comes to see us. If we want to exercise, we can go out. But the air's better here than it is on the first floor. And the view! Why, we overlook all the houses round."

"Yes, this is all that we need," Dalville replied; and Bertrand, observing that his master's smile was a little forced, made haste to add:

"I have already noticed, at that window in the roof over there, a very good-looking young girl."

"Where? where?" cried Auguste, running to the window.

"See, close by us, where the window is open. We can look right into her room, which is very convenient. And there's the girl I saw just now. She has evidently noticed that she has a new neighbor, and she isn't sorry to be looked at."

"She is really very good-looking: a good figure, and a saucy expression, eh, Bertrand?"

"So it seems to me, lieutenant."

"She's working with a frame; she must be a lace-maker."

"Oh! you can hardly expect to find duchesses living in chambers under the eaves."

"Somebody's opening a window just beyond her—do you see—where there are clothes hanging on a line?"

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Oh! what a lovely blonde, Bertrand! Do you see her?"

"I can't see so well as you, but I should say that she's young, too."

"She is lovely, I give you my word; much more so, in fact, than the first one, who is still looking at us. Gad! Bertrand, we shall do excellently well here, and I like the rooms very much."

"They're very nice, aren't they, lieutenant?"

"The view alone is enough for me; I couldn't see all these sweet creatures from downstairs, could I?"

"It would have been rather hard."

"I am delighted to live on the fifth floor."

"And I'm overjoyed to have you satisfied, lieutenant."

Bertrand rubbed his hands, because he had restored Auguste's good spirits by flattering his weakness; and Auguste, whom the sight of all those roofs had depressed at first, could not tear himself away from his window, because from it he could look into the rooms of his two charming neighbors.

The one with the mischievous eye and free-and-easy manner did not keep her eyes fixed on her frame, but glanced often at the young dandy who had taken up his abode under the eaves. Although in less affluent circumstances, Auguste had made no change in his dress; for the dress of a man of fashion never changes, whether his income is larger or smaller. Moreover, Auguste was a very good-looking fellow, with distinguished manners, and that fact seemed to arouse the young working girl's curiosity, for she had not always such good company opposite her.

The young woman soon laid aside her work altogether; she walked about her room, arranged her bureau drawers, lighted her fire, looked at herself in the mirror, adjusted her neckerchief and prepared her dinner; each of her actions being accompanied by a glance at the opposite window. Auguste, who saw all that went on in her room, kept at his post, saying from time to time:

"Upon my word, Bertrand, it's very amusing to live on the fifth floor."

He looked also at the window where he had seen a pretty blonde; but she had simply taken in some of the linen that was drying, then closed the window without glancing at her neighbors.

Meanwhile, it had grown dark and the dinner hour had arrived. Auguste left his window and went blithely down the five flights. He returned home earlier than usual that evening and opened his window, although it was midwinter. He saw that there was a light in both of his neighbors' rooms. The lace-maker had little curtains that covered only the lower sash; and as her window was on a lower level than Dalville's, he could look over the little curtains into the room, which was brightly lighted, and see the girl going to and fro between the mirror and the fireplace, and apparently engrossed by her little cap, and a saucepan that was on the fire.

"For heaven's sake, doesn't that girl think about anything but her cooking?" said Auguste to himself; "this afternoon she was getting her dinner, and now I suppose she's getting her supper. There seems to be no lack of appetite under the eaves. True, Bertrand did tell me that the air was sharper. Ah! now she's going back to her mirror. She is a flirt, I noticed that this afternoon; her hair is dressed with more care than it was. Can she be expecting company? Why not? Isn't one at liberty to enjoy oneself in an attic as well as elsewhere? Are the rich alone privileged to receive their friends? Their friends! what do I say? One is much more likely to receive them on the fifth floor; and flatterers and parasites and parvenus don't disturb one here. It really is most delightful to room on the fifth floor.— Ah! what do I see?"

Auguste saw the young lace-maker, who, after adjusting her cap to her satisfaction, removed her jacket and short skirt, and donned a white chemise; while the young man, his eyes glued upon her little room, exclaimed excitedly:

"Very pretty! very pretty, on my word! I never saw anything better on the first floor! Ah! this apartment of mine is beyond price!"

Her toilet completed, the young woman set out her supper on a small table; she laid two covers.

"The deuce!" muttered Auguste; "the company that she expects consists of but one person; the party will be no-larger than those in the private rooms at the Tournebride. But no matter! let us wait and see what happens."

A young man in a blouse and otter-skin cap arrived and was received with a joyful exclamation, to which he replied by a kiss so heartily bestowed that Dalville fancied that he heard the report; and he scratched his ear, muttering:

"The devil! the devil! shall I keep on looking? Why not? I shall at least know what to expect."

The supper was on the table; but the gallant in the otter-skin cap had more love than appetite. He continued to snatch kisses, dallying the while with the girl, whom he seemed inclined to lead away from the table rather than toward it.

"The deuce!" said Auguste, "it's evident that people make love under the eaves no less than on first floors. This fellow in a jacket seems to know as much about it as the most skilful boudoir seducer. The deuce! the deuce!"

And Auguste finally left the window in a pet, exclaiming:

"I don't need to see any more; these young women who invite their best friends to supper ought to have their curtains so arranged as to reach to the top of the window."

Auguste walked about his apartment for a moment or two, but he soon made the circuit of it. Bertrand was in bed and asleep. As he scrutinized his new abode, Auguste noticed the absence of several articles of furniture to which he had become accustomed, but which had not been taken up to the fifth floor, where they had retained only what was absolutely necessary. Dalville realized that that sacrifice was indispensable; but his brow darkened, he threw himself into a chair, and unpleasant thoughts assailed him. It was very late, when, in an effort to dispel those thoughts, he returned to his window. There was no longer a light in the young lace-maker's window, and Auguste was not sorry, for he had seen enough in that direction. He looked toward the window where he had seen an attractive blonde; and there, although he could see a glimmer of light, a dilapidated curtain, torn in several places, prevented him from looking into the room.

After looking about at the other houses nearby, thinking of *Le Diable Boiteux*, of which that picture reminded him, Auguste, having no Asmodeus to assist him to see what was taking place under the roofs, was about to leave his window. Twelve o'clock had struck long before, the most profound silence reigned in the street; the place that is resplendent with light and movement at nine o'clock is often dark and gloomy a few hours later.

But, as he cast a last glance at the house opposite, Auguste saw the window opened, of which the torn curtain had prevented a view of the interior. A not unnatural curiosity led the young man to continue to look;

and, his light having gone out, he did not turn to relight it, although it did not occur to him that he was able thus to see without being seen.

The room, which he could now see quite plainly, presented a melancholy appearance: bare walls, a wretched sack of straw in one corner, a table, and a chair or two—nothing else was to be seen in that poor abode, where want and misfortune seemed to dwell. The room was dimly lighted by a flickering lamp.

An elderly man was alone in the room; his dress, although shabby, was not that of a workman; his hair was white and his face looked worn and haggard; everything about his person and in his manner denoted an ominous and desperate agitation.

Auguste's heart swelled with pity as he gazed at that old man; curiosity gave place at once to profound interest, and it was a secret apprehension that led him to follow his every movement.

After opening the window, the old man went to the back of the room, walking with care and apparently listening. He opened softly the door of a small dressing-room, in which Auguste caught sight of a bed. Doubtless the bed had an occupant, for the old man stopped, and stood for some moments gazing at the person who was sleeping there; then he wiped away with his hand the tears that flowed from his eyes.

After a few moments he stepped forward, taking care to make no noise, and imprinted a kiss on the brow of the person in the bed; he seemed unable to tear himself away and to give over his silent contemplation. He fell on his knees and raised his hands as if praying to God for the person from whom it was so hard for him to part. Then he rose and sank into a chair, as if overwhelmed by grief. At that moment Auguste could

distinguish nothing clearly; his eyes were filled with tears, which rolled unnoticed down his cheeks.

But suddenly the old man, as if he had ceased to listen to aught save his despair, sprang to his feet and ran to the window, cast a last glance about him, and climbed out. His foot was already on the edge when a cry of horror arose.—“Stop! stop!” Those were the only words that Auguste was able to articulate. His own body was half out of the window; he wished to save the unfortunate man, but was afraid to leave his post lest he should accomplish his deadly purpose before he could go downstairs and up again.

Auguste’s cry startled the poor fellow; he stopped and turned his head toward the little room, thinking that the tones that had gone to his heart had come from there. His strength abandoned him, the gloomy frenzy which impelled him gave place to weakness, to the prostration which always succeeds paroxysms of nervous excitement. He sank into a chair, a woman’s name issued from his mouth, and his tears flowed afresh.

“I can go down,” thought Auguste; “I have time enough now to go to him.”

Running hurriedly to his desk, Auguste seized his wallet, then rushed downstairs four at a time. He woke Schtrack, who opened the door for him; then ran across the street and knocked at the door of the old man’s house. The shower of blows led the concierge to think that the house was on fire, and that some obliging passer-by had stopped to inform him. He rose hastily, ran to the door in his shirt, and exclaimed, still half asleep:

“Which chimney? Where’s it coming out? Has it got much headway?—Wife! wife!—Where’s the firemen?”

"Don't get excited; there's nothing wrong," said Auguste; "but I absolutely must speak to the old man who lives on the fifth floor. Here."

And Auguste put a hundred-sou piece in the concierge's hand and hurried upstairs, leaving that worthy rubbing his eyes, as he stared at the coin in his hand, and finally went out into the street to make sure that there was no smoke to be seen anywhere.

When Auguste reached the top floor, the lamplight shining under the ill-fitting door guided his steps.

"Who's there?" asked the old man, surprised that anyone should call at his room so late.

"Open, in heaven's name!" Auguste replied; "it's a friend, it is one who wishes to dry your tears."

The word "friend" seemed to confound the unfortunate man. However, he made up his mind at last to open the door, and gazed in surprise at the young man, whose features were entirely unknown to him, and who came at one o'clock in the morning to offer his services. But Auguste's face was gentle and kindly, and his eyes expressed the tenderest interest in the old man, who allowed him to enter his bare room.

"What do you want, monsieur?" he asked in a faltering tone.

"To comfort you—to save you from despair."

"But, monsieur, who told you——"

"I saw you just now. You were on the point of carrying out a ghastly plan."

"Ah! so it was your voice, monsieur!—Poor Anna! I thought it was yours!—But she was asleep; she is sleeping still. Oh! monsieur, I implore you, never let her know. And yet what am I to do here on earth, penniless, without food? She is killing herself to support me! She deprives herself of everything for my sake!"

The unhappy wretch, abandoning himself to his grief, did not notice that he was raising his voice.

"Hush!" said Auguste; "you'll wake her. Let us not talk so loud. Tell me your troubles; I tell you again, I propose to put an end to them."

Auguste's tone and his pleasant voice inspired confidence in the unhappy father; he sat down beside the young man, as far as possible from the small dressing-room, and began his story in an undertone.

"I was not born in poverty, monsieur, and perhaps that is my misfortune. My family was highly considered; my name——"

"I do not ask it, monsieur; I do not need to know your name, to make me wish to be of use to you; I wish to know your misfortunes only."

The old man's amazement redoubled. With another glance at Auguste, he began once more:

"I received a superficial education; but I was to have twenty thousand francs a year, and I was assured that I knew quite enough. I was left my own master altogether too early in life. I was passionately fond of pleasure; I was especially addicted to that charming sex which—of which I must say no evil, since it is my Anna's. But I abandoned myself blindly to my passions, and I squandered my fortune with mistresses who deceived me, and with false friends who helped me ruin myself."

Here Auguste could not restrain a sigh, but he motioned to the old man to go on.

"Sometimes I determined to reform, but I was never able to listen to the counsel of reason. When I was thirty-nine, I had spent all my property and I was entirely unused to work.

"Thereupon a generous woman, who loved me for myself alone, determined to throw in her lot with mine.

She possessed a competence; she married me and gave me my Anna. I might have been happy, but I had become so accustomed to fashionable life that I had a craving for spending money. I longed to supply my wife with the beautiful things that I saw on other women; it angered me to see women who were not her equals wearing cashmere shawls. In vain did she tell me that my love alone was enough for her. I persuaded myself that she was concealing her wishes from me, and that she suffered all sorts of privations. Endeavoring to add to our means, I did the wildest things: I gambled, I mortgaged our property, and I reduced to want the woman who had entrusted her destiny to me. Thereupon, realizing the error of my ways, I tried to find employment, but I was no longer young, and I could not succeed in obtaining it. Regret tore my heart, and blanched my hair prematurely; I look to you like a very old man, and I am not yet sixty. My wife did not reproach me; she died commending our daughter, then eight years old, to my care. I tried to utilize what little talent I had, but it was very little, and as I grew older I rarely found anything to do. Meanwhile my Anna was growing, and she began very early to work to support her unhappy father. If you knew, monsieur, all that I owe her! How many nights she has worked, in order to add to her earnings! Never any rest, never any pleasure for her; and yet, not a word of complaint; it is she who comforts me when she sees that I am more than ordinarily depressed, when I reproach myself for my misconduct. Oh! I do not try to conceal my wrongdoing, monsieur. It was my folly alone that led me to lose my own fortune and squander that of my wife. My daughter might be happy, and yet for ten years past, only toil and tears have been her lot! And I alone am

the cause! Do you still think that I am deserving of your pity?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Auguste, pressing the stranger's hand. "But what impelled you to such a desperate resolution to-night?"

"Despite my failings, monsieur, I have always been careful of my honor; I have thrown away my fortune, but at least I have no reason to reproach myself for failing to keep my engagements. Two years ago I met a man whom I had known in my prosperous days; he came to me and called me his friend as of old. I told him my troubles; he placed his purse at my disposal and lent me twelve hundred francs. 'You may take your own time about paying me,' he said. Alas! a long illness prevented me from earning anything; however, my creditor made no demand on me, but the excellent man, who is in business now, was unfortunate himself and lost heavily by several failures. Two months ago he came to ask me if I could repay him, but it was impossible. He did not reproach me, and he did not come again; but I learned yesterday that a heartless creditor of his had caused his imprisonment for a bill of one thousand francs. That news made me desperate. If I had paid my debt, that honest man would still be at liberty! Alas! I have brought misfortune upon everybody who has taken an interest in me! My Anna deprives herself of everything for her father's sake.—Ah! monsieur, ought I still to cling to an existence which is a weary burden to me?"

Auguste took out his wallet and took from it three one thousand-franc notes, which he placed in the old man's hand, saying:

"Pay the twelve hundred francs that you owe, and with what is left buy a small shop for your daughter. I am sure that happier days are in store for you."

The old man could not determine whether he was the dupe of a dream. What had happened to him seemed so extraordinary, that he dared not give way to his delight. He looked first at Dalville, then at the bank-notes which he had put in his hand, and could only falter:

"Great God! is it possible? Such unforeseen good-fortune! Excellent young man!—Pardon me, monsieur! Why, you are an angel sent to us from heaven!"

"No, I am no angel," said Auguste, with a smile; "on the contrary, I have all the failings of mortals; but I am happy to be able to assist two unfortunate fellow-creatures so easily."

"But, monsieur, this is a considerable sum——"

"It is not enough to pay for the lesson you have given me."

"How so?"

"Adieu, monsieur, it's very late; get some rest now; you need it, and I trust that it will be of the sweetest."

"What! you are going to leave us already? Oh! please let me tell my daughter how much I owe you. Allow her too to thank our benefactor. Ah! you don't know my Anna—as lovely as she is good. The sight of her will bring home to you all that you have done for me by giving me the means to make the dear child happy!"

The old man walked toward the dressing-room, but Auguste stopped him, saying in an undertone:

"Don't wake her, I beg you. I will see her another time; don't disturb her sleep."

"As you insist, monsieur, I obey you; but tell me your name, I pray; let me know to whom I am indebted."

"I will tell you to-morrow."

"My name is Dorfeuil, monsieur; I am most anxious that you should know to whom you have restored life and honor."

Auguste escaped from the old man's thanks and finally left that abode whither he had carried joy and repose. He went down the five flights in high spirits, and better pleased with himself than he had ever been.

"There are two people whom I have rescued from despair," he said to himself; "and all I have to do is to imagine that Destival carried off another three thousand francs."

Returning to his fifth floor apartment, Auguste went to bed and did not wake until the morning had far advanced.

"It seems to me, lieutenant, that you slept rather well in your new lodgings?" said Bertrand as he entered Auguste's room.

"I really believe that I never slept so well on the first floor."

But the ex-corporal was amazed to see that his master did not once go to the window, and at the end of the day he expressed his surprise.

"Don't you like our view any more, lieutenant?"

"No, my friend, I have reflected, and I think that it's a risky thing to look into other people's rooms."

"But I should say that you saw some very pretty little things, didn't you, lieutenant?"

"I saw some very sad things, too. All things considered, I think that it's better not to pay any attention to what goes on in our neighbors' houses."

Auguste had another reason for not going to his window; he did not want to be seen by the old man, who would have recognized him, and whom he did not propose to visit again. He knew that poor Dorfeuil's daughter was lovely; he distrusted his own weakness and preferred not to run the risk of spoiling his kindly action.

XVIII

THE GRISETTES AT THE VILLAGE.—THE EVENING
PARTY AND THE GHOST

"We won't go to see Monsieur Auguste again," Denise declared on her return to the village; and when her aunt asked her if the fine gentleman in Paris had given them a warm welcome, the girl could not keep back the tears as she murmured:

"We waited at his house more than three hours, and he only spoke to us for a minute!"

"What! he didn't thank you for your chickens, my dear child, or say anything about my cake?"

"Oh! yes, aunt."

"What more do you want, my child? In Paris, you see, people are always in such a hurry that they don't have time to talk; it ain't as it is with us."

Denise did not tell her aunt that Monsieur Dalville did not so much as thank her for her present, for that would have made Mère Fourcy angry, and the girl still hoped that the young man would come to see them; he was so pleasant when he came to the village that she would soon forget his coolness in the city.

"And what about that money?" asked Mère Fourcy; "what did he say about that, my child?"

"Nothing, aunt—that is to say, we are to do what we please with it."

"Then we must have the house rebuilt and the garden sowed; that will be Coco's own property."

"Yes, aunt."

Denise allowed her aunt to have her way; she no longer had any heart for anything, her melancholy seemed to increase every day, and the child's endearments were powerless to divert her. She sought relief from her sorrows in toil; but in the midst of her rustic duties, which were formerly her delight, Denise would pause, heave a sigh, and stand sometimes for many minutes, lost in thought.

When Mère Fourcy surprised her in one of these fits of melancholy, she would run to her and ask:

"What on earth is the matter with you, girl?"

"Nothing, aunt," Denise would reply, trying hard to smile.

"But you was standing there without moving, and you didn't say a word."

"Because I was thinking, aunt."

"What about, my child?"

"I don't remember."

"You're sick, that's what's the matter with you!"

"I'm sure I don't know, aunt."

"Pardi! I can see it plain enough. You're growing thin, and you're pale as a ghost, and you don't eat anything. You must get married, my dear."

"Oh, no! I don't want to, aunt!"

"Then you must take medicine, for, I tell you, you need to take something."

Mère Fourcy could think of nothing save a husband or medicine capable of restoring Denise's bloom; but the girl declared that it would return with the warm weather, because she hoped that the return of the spring would bring Auguste back to the village.

The winter days were very long, especially to the village girl, who no longer took any pleasure in the evening reunions, who listened without interest to the jokes

of the young men, and who had no one for whom she cared to beautify herself. Although one may find enjoyment in musing beneath an oak tree's shade, although the sight of green grass and verdant shrubbery may allay the pangs of love, the interior of a farm-house, and the quacking of geese and ducks must be intolerable to a heart that craves silence and solitude. Denise, obliged to conceal her unhappiness from her aunt, remained in her room and watched the Paris road.

One day when a sharp frost had hardened the ground, although the sun still made the gnarled and leafless trees attractive to the eye, Denise, who was at her chamber window, heard talking and laughing on the path leading to their house. The voices were evidently not those of villagers, and, in fact, two ladies dressed like Parisians appeared on the tree-lined path, looking about them, evidently with no very clear idea where they were going, and stopping every minute to laugh, and to rest by the hedge.

Denise recognized one of them as the young woman whom she had met at Auguste's rooms in Paris, and who had walked with her to the stage office, manifesting the deepest interest in her. The sight of a person who knew Dalville, who had come perhaps with a message from him, caused the girl keen pleasure, and she at once left her room, to go out and accost the strangers.

Denise was not mistaken: Virginie, to whose mind the pretty village maiden she had met at Auguste's apartment recurred now and again, had spoken of her to one of her friends. This friend was a tall brunette of some thirty years, with a fine figure, but with a bold expression that would have intimidated a dragoon. A dressmaker by trade, but passionately fond of the theatre, she neglected her thread and needle to enact tragic princesses

and heroines of melodrama in private theatres. Despite her determined manner, sentiment was Mademoiselle Cézarine's weakness; she always had a passion on the carpet, and would have gone on the stage for good and all, had she been able to overcome an unfortunate lisp. For the rest, Mademoiselle Cézarine was a good-natured soul and incapable of trying to seduce a friend's lover.

A fine winter's day suggested to Virginie the idea of a trip to Montfermeil. At the first mention of the country, Cézarine had exclaimed:

"I'll go with you, my dear; I feel the need of dithtraction to-day. Théodore hath been playing trickth on me. Let'th go and thee your little peathant; we'll drink milk, and perhapth that will pathify my mind."

"Let's go," Virginie assented; "I don't know the exact address, but I know it's Montfermeil, and my tongue ain't in my pocket."

"Oh! we'll thoon find the plathe. Do you thuppothe that I, who could find Théodore in any corner in Parith, won't very thoon make a thorough thearch of a village?"

"I'll introduce you as a relative of mine; for we must have some excuse."

"Don't you be alarmed. Haven't I acted Themiramith? Don't I carry mythelf like a queen?"

"I know you've played Semiramis, but there are times when no one would suspect it."

"Let'th be off and take the thage."

"All right. I'm sure that the little girl will be glad to see me. My dear, you are going to see a case of perfect innocence."

"Tho much the better; I don't like anything but innothenthe, now I know that rathcal Théodore is falth to me."

"Great heaven! are you going to talk about your Théodore all the way? that will be amusing!—By the way, there's one difficulty—I haven't a sou."

"Oh! I've got enough for both. Wait till I count. I've got a hundred and fifteen thouth."

"With that sum we can go to the Mississippi. Put on your Sunday hat and your home-raised cashmere; and off we go."

Mademoiselle Cézarine put on her bird-of-paradise hat, which the sun had faded to a pale yellow, and the shawl, once of amaranthine hue, in which the flowers had become so blended with the background that it was difficult to distinguish them. But when one indulges frequently in grand passions, one sometimes makes sacrifices, and Mademoiselle Cézarine preferred one glance from the man of her choice to the diamonds of a Russian prince; therein she differed essentially from Mademoiselle Virginie.

The young women took their seats in the stage; there were no other passengers except two old peasants, at whom they made faces all the way, because they detected an unpleasant odor about them. At last they arrived at Montfermeil, and, Virginie having inquired where Denise lived, they were directed to the path where the girl discovered them.

"My dear love," said Cézarine, "I don't thee the ruthitic roof that thelterth your young friend, and I am beginning to be doothid hungry."

"Wait, it must be close by."

"What a lovely morning! If that ungrateful Théodore had only come with uth!"

"Yes, to eat up your hundred and fifteen sous in one meal! Dieu! what a fool you are to go wild like this over a man who ruins you! Let's go on a little farther."

"My dear, it'th too much for me; it'th no uthe for me to thay: 'I mutht forget him!'"

"I'll sing it for you, if you want; perhaps that wil have more effect on you."

"Ah! he hath thuch lovely whithkerth. It wath hith whithkerth that fathinated me firht."

"You ought to have had them made into a cravat."

"You're alwayth joking. How lucky you are, Virginie! you don't know what a violent pathion ith."

"The deuce I don't! I've had more of 'em than you have!—Oh! see that pretty little house, and the farm—That must certainly be the place."

"I don't believe your village girl livth in thuch a nithe houthé."

"Why not, pray? If you had seen the plump chickens she brought Auguste, you wouldn't be surprised."

The appearance of Denise put an end to their uncertainty. The girl ran to meet Virginie, kissed her, and made a respectful curtsy to Cézarine, who cried:

"What! ith thith your young village girl? How pretty she ith! The deuthé! what a pretty fathe! Ah! I'm very glad now that Théodore didn't come!"

Virginie trod on Cézarine's foot, as a hint to her to be quiet, and said to Denise:

"I haven't forgotten you, you see, my dear; I have come to see you without ceremony, and brought my cousin with me. We don't put you out of the way, do we?"

"Oh, no, madame! on the contrary, I am very glad. It's very kind of you to come. My aunt will be delighted to see you—and madame too."

"Will you let me kith you, my child?" said Cézarine.

"Yes, madame, with pleasure. But come—come into the house. You may not have dined yet?"

“Well, hardly, my dear; all I’ve had ith a little piece of thauthage when I got up.”

“Yes,” said Virginie, treading on Cézarine’s foot again, “my cousin and I have begun to realize that fresh air sharpens the appetite. But we’re going to the inn——”

“Oh! I hope that you’ll stay with us, madame. It would be very unkind of you to refuse.”

“Dieu! how pretty the ith! the hath Théodore’s nothe.”

“We accept, my dear Denise, so long as it won’t put you out. Besides, the merest trifles from people one likes always give more pleasure—than the dainty dishes one mightn’t find somewhere else——”

Denise’s only reply was to run ahead to tell her aunt, and Virginie said to her friend:

“For heaven’s sake, be careful what you say, and remember to behave decently. What with your Théodore, whom you lug into the conversation at every turn——”

“And you lothe yourthelf in your thentences and can’t find your way out of them!”

“No matter—long sentences are what you want with peasants; they don’t understand ’em, but they think they’re fine.”

“Well, I’ll thay Théodore ith my huthband and that he’th in the army.”

As they talked, the ladies reached the farmyard, where the geese, ducks, dog and goat greeted them with a little impromptu concert.

“Oh! how I love the country!” cried Virginie, running forward to kiss Coco, while Cézarine did her utmost to keep her shawl out of the dog’s mouth. Meanwhile, Mère Fourcy came out to receive the travellers whom her niece had announced as fashionable ladies from Paris, of Monsieur Auguste’s acquaintance, and to whom the good woman conceived that she owed the greatest respect.

"This is my aunt, madame," said Denise to Virginie; and the latter saluted the old woman with the patronizing air of a woman of fashion, saying:

"I am very glad to make the acquaintance of your venerable aunt. Dieu! what an antique cast of countenance! I am very fond of elderly people. Let me embrace you, madame."

Having embraced Mère Fourcy, Virginie called Cézarine:

"Cousin, come here and let me present you to our excellent aunt."

"One moment, please," said Cézarine, "until I get rid of this miserable dog of herth, that hath grabbed my catmere. Oh! I know what the matter is—day before yesterday I wrapped up a leg of mutton in it——"

Virginie coughed to drown Cézarine's words, and the latter at last escaped from the dog and bestowed a regal salutation on Mère Fourcy.

"This is my cousin," said Virginie, presenting her friend to Denise's aunt. "I told her about your lovely niece, and she could not resist the desire to make her acquaintance and yours, venerable aunt; we left our hotels and climbed into the wretched chamber vessel called a stage, where we had no other company than a couple of old clowns who smelt of rancid butter. But when we are going to see people we like and esteem, we take a standing jump over all such little annoyances, don't we, cousin?"

"Yeth, my dear," Cézarine replied, walking like Semiramis.

"It's very kind of you, madame," said Mère Fourcy, "and we appreciate your courtesy. But you must have something to eat."

"We have already dined à la *fourchette*, but we don't like to decline."

"For my part, I could eat all day long in the country," said Cézarine.

The ladies entered the house, and while the table was being laid, Cézarine petted Coco.

"What a hanthome boy! what a fine profile!" she exclaimed. "He'll look like Théodore. Ith he yourth, my beauty?"

This question was addressed to Denise, who blushed as she replied:

"What did you say, madame?"

"You're infernally stupid!" cried Virginie; "the idea of asking this child such a question, as if she was old enough to—Why, she hasn't begun to think of such things."

"Look you, my dear, I don't know her ekthact age. Bethideth, I've got a thithter who wath a mother at thirteen."

"Is she a Creole, then?"

"Yeth, a Creole from the Pont-aux-Choux."

Luckily Mère Fourcy was in the cellar at that moment, so that she did not hear the colloquy between the two ladies. Denise longed to learn something about Auguste, but she dared not take the liberty to ask Virginie; she was afraid that that young woman would divine her profound interest in him, and the poor child would have been terribly abashed to have those fine ladies of Paris, both of whom she believed to be friends of Auguste, know her heart's secret. To that sweet child love was all in all; she was very far from suspecting that to her two visitors it was a very small matter.

While Denise was preparing the repast, Virginie insisted upon helping Mère Fourcy to set the table, which

the old woman would not allow; and during the contest between the peasant and the Parisian, a bottle slipped from under the arm of the former and fell at Cézarine's feet, where it broke and spattered her dress.

"O Dieu! my merino is all thpotted!" she cried; "what am I going to do? I haven't got another."

"You can wear your velvet," said Virginie, motioning to her to be careful what she said. Cézarine, engrossed by her dress, paid no heed but continued to complain.

"It'th jutht the dreth that ith motht becoming to me; I wore it when I captivated Théodore."

"That's her husband, who's in the army—he's a general.—Come, cousin, you have made enough fuss over your dress. You have plenty of others, I should say."

"I thertainly did have all thothe I put up the thpout——"

"Up the spout, Mère Fourcy, means cutting them up into towels. You see, we are all so changeable in Paris—we have to have a new dress every week; we throw our money out of the window! A wicked place that Paris is! Happy the people who live in villages! Ah! the country! trees and animals and rye bread—that's what I call happiness! I hope to end by buying a little château or a cottage—it's all one to me, so long as it's in the country. As for Denise, whom I love as if I was her mother, if there's one thing I'd advise her to do, it's to stay here and not go to Paris again. However, I fancy she don't care much about it; and the way Monsieur Dalville received her the last time—why, it made me frantic! And to think that the poor child had brought him fresh eggs and such a fine cake!"

Denise, returning with a huge soup-kettle full to the brim, overheard Virginie's last words and halted behind Cézarine, motioning to Virginie to say nothing to her

aunt. Virginie, being accustomed to dissemble, understood the girl's signs and continued, trying to repair her blunder:

"After all, the young man is very excusable, for you see, Madame Fourcy, there are people in Paris who don't like cake; it isn't as it is in the village, where it takes the place of salad. And then, Auguste is a little thoughtless; but his heart's in the right place! yes, he has a very kind heart! I know him better than anybody. Besides, at this time above all others, I shouldn't think of speaking ill of him; and although he's ruined——"

"Ruined!" cried Denise; and in her emotion the girl dropped the kettle, whose contents completed the disfigurement of Cézarine's gown.

"Great God! but I'm unlucky to-day!" she cried, as she gazed at her garment; "how do you expect me to go back to Parith, and play *Andromaque* on Monday, in thith dreth?"

Mère Fourcy lost herself in apologies; but Denise paid no heed to the accident she had caused; she ran to Virginie, exclaiming:

"Ruined! Monsieur Auguste ruined! Oh! mon Dieu! madame, how did it happen, pray?"

"I'll tell you directly, my dear love."

Virginie, first of all, seated herself at the table; Cézarine did the same and forgot the accidents that had happened to her dress as she helped herself to double portions. Mère Fourcy stood respectfully before the young women, and poor Denise, with her eyes fixed on Virginie's, waited impatiently until she should choose to tell her what had happened to Auguste.

"Pray be seated, venerable aunt," said Virginie to Mère Fourcy, who believed that she was entertaining ladies from the court.

"Indeed, madame, I shall not think of it!"

"I thall refuthe to eat if you continue to thtand," said C  zarine, as she ate her third egg.

"I know too well what I owe you, madame."

"You don't owe us anything at all, M  re Fourcy; on the contrary, we ought to be waiting on you."

"Oh, madame! the idea!"

"Respect the wrinkled—that's my motto. Sit down, I say!"

"How well madame would play the mother of Coriolanuth!"

"Let's drop Coriolanus, cousin, and give Madame Fourcy a chair."

As she spoke, Virginie rose from the table, seized M  re Fourcy's arms and led her to a chair. As the peasant woman continued to resist, Virginie pushed her backward and ended by taking her by the shoulders and forcing her to the floor beside the chair. The good woman fell almost under the table, while Virginie, thinking that she was seated, resumed her own place. But when she found that she could not see her, she said:

"I am afraid that I have given you rather a low chair, but, at all events, you'll be more comfortable than if you were standing."

"That'th a very nithe theat you've got!" said C  zarine, as she assisted M  re Fourcy to rise. "Why, did you fall? Thee what cometh of holding back! Did you hurt yourself?"

"You're very kind, madame—just a little bit, on the hip."

"That can't help doing you good; it thtirth up the blood. Take a theat, pray."

M  re Fourcy did not wait to be urged any more; and when tranquillity was restored, Denise said once more:

"And Monsieur Auguste, madame?"

"Oh, yes! to be sure! I haven't told you how he came to be ruined. The first reason why I haven't is that I don't know anything about it; but still, it's easy enough to guess: the fellow acted like a goose, gambling, spending a lot, and paying his mistresses. I've said to him twenty times: 'Auguste, you're driving too hard!' Yes, I've told him so very often, but I always used the familiar thou, because I knew him when he was such a little fellow!"

"I should have said the young gentleman was about your age," said Mère Fourcy.

"So he is, very near; but we were brought up together—we had the same nurse—so that I'm deeply attached to him; and although he lives on the fifth floor now, that won't prevent my going to breakfast with him, as I told Bertrand yesterday, when he told me that the funds were low."

"But Monsieur Auguste must be very unhappy, it must make him very sad to be ruined," sighed Denise.

"He, my dear girl! not a bit of it! Oh! you don't know him; he's just as wild and heedless as ever. Bertrand said so yesterday. Poor Bertrand! I saw a tear in his eye while he was telling me about his master's follies! He's a faithful servant, that fellow, a real friend! Give me something to drink, Semiramis, for, I notice that, while I am talking, you do nothing but fill your own glass. Semiramis is the name of an estate belonging to my cousin; she has estates in all the suburbs of Paris."

"I say, Denise," cried Mère Fourcy, "if that gentleman's lost his money, hadn't we ought to give back what he left for Coco? What a pity the cottage is all built!"

"What's given is given, Madame Fourcy," said Virginie; "that's a principle I've never departed from. It's

a mistake to act on the theory of returning what you've received."

"Ah! if I had all I've given to Théodore!"

"He's a husband of my cousin. She's given him the measles twice, and you can understand that she wouldn't be overjoyed to have them returned. Give me something to drink, Semiramis."

Denise took no further part in the conversation; she was pensive and entirely engrossed by what she had learned on the subject of the young gentleman from Paris. The two grisettes, finding themselves very comfortable at the table, jabbered to their hearts' content. Mère Fourcy opened her eyes and ears, not always able to understand the pretty stories that those ladies told her; but as they did not give her a chance to put in a word, there was nothing for her to do but to stare in amazement.

They had been at table a long time, Mère Fourcy seated between them, doing nothing but turn her head from side to side. Denise had left the room, unobserved; the poor child's heart was heavy; thinking that Auguste was in distress, she longed to let her tears flow and wished to conceal them from the Parisians. Coco, who was playing in the yard, saw her pass. The boy saw that she was unhappy, so he dropped his toys, ran to her and said:

"What's the matter, my little Denise?"

"You don't know, Coco, that your kind friend, who has given you so many things, is poor now, and unhappy perhaps."

"We must carry him some more eggs and cake, my little Denise; he'll like to have them, if he's poor. When I lived in the old hut with gradma, I used to be so happy when you brought me some white bread! I didn't use to have it very often then."

Denise kissed Coco; what the child said had given rise to a secret hope in her heart. She wiped her eyes and returned to the living-room, where the party had been increased by the arrival of a villager, formerly the school-teacher, who had come to pay Mère Fourcy a visit, and at sight of the two young ladies from Paris, had come near knocking over a wardrobe, in order to make a more graceful bow; while Virginie winked at Cézarine, who hid her face in her napkin to avoid laughing in the face of the newcomer, whose features were an exact reproduction of the absurd masks sold in Carnival time.

"Good-day, neighbor Mauflard," said Mère Fourcy to the ex-school-teacher.

"Good-day, neighbor Fourcy."

"How goes it, neighbor Mauflard?"

"Very well, neighbor Fourcy. Faith, I didn't have anything to do, so I says to myself: 'I'll just go and see neighbor Fourcy.'"

"That's right good of you, neighbor."

"But if you've got company, I don't want to be in the way."

"Do stay, Monsieur Mauflard," said Virginie; "we should be terribly distressed to frighten you away."

"I don't believe that monthieur ith afraid of the fair thex."

The neighbor replied with a second bow, so low that he could have picked a coin from the floor with his teeth; then he took a chair and seated himself.

"You'll take a drink, neighbor Mauflard, won't you?"

"With pleasure, Mère Fourcy."

A glass was filled for neighbor Mauflard, and this he emptied after bowing to the whole company; then he settled back in his chair, murmuring:

"That's good, very good—always the same."

"Who is neighbor Mauflard?" Virginie asked Aunt Fourcy in a whisper.

"Oh! he's a very fine man. He used to keep a school in the village; but not long ago he retired, as he didn't have but two scholars."

"I'm thorry for that; I'd have thent Hecuba to him."

"What does she mean by Hecuba?"

"That's my cousin's daughter—a charming child; she isn't three yet, and she bites at everything."

"Oh! that'th tho; the'd bite at marble!"

"Neighbor Mauflard is one of the most knowing men hereabout."

"Anyone can see that by looking at him. But he don't say anything. Have another glass, Monsieur Mauflard?"

The neighbor's only reply was a prolonged snore; according to his custom, he had already fallen asleep.

"Why, he's asleep!" said Virginie.

"Oh, yes, that's his way; as soon as he comes in, he sits down and shuts his eyes."

"That certainly makes him a very pleasant companion!"

"He'th like that villain of a Théodore, who alwayth uthed to go to thleep ath thoon ath he had thaid thome blackguardly thing to me."

"She means her husband, who must always have his siesta. He brought that habit from Spain, with chocolate."

"I say, Denise," cried Mère Fourcy; "I know why neighbor Mauflard came here to-day; didn't we say at Claudine's last night that we'd have the party here to-night?"

"Oh! dear, yes!" Denise replied dejectedly; "that was a very unfortunate idea of yours."

"A village party!" said Cézarine, leaving the table; "oh! what fun that will be! I've often heard of them, but I never thaw one."

"Nor I," said Virginie; "and yet I've seen a great many things. I say! if we should pass the night here, we could attend the party. What do you say, cousin?"

"I thay that cabs won't coht any more to-morrow morning than to-night."

"It isn't a question of cabs. I know that we didn't bring our own carriage, so as not to tire our horses; but we must find out whether it will inconvenience our venerable aunt to put us up to-night."

"Oh! we've got room, madame."

"It will be very kind of you to stay," said Denise, hoping to have more talk of Auguste with Virginie.

"But the ladies will have to be satisfied with rather a hard bed."

"We shall be very comfortable."

"I'm not hard to pleathe; I've thlept on thraw more than onth."

Virginie nudged Cézarine and added hastily:

"Oh, yes! in the country—as a joke—just for sport."

"Yeth, and I rather like it; it ith great fun—it prickth."

"Oh! I don't propose that you shall be pricked," said Mère Fourcy; "I'll fix up a bed for you in the little back chamber."

"Don't put yourself out in the least, dear aunt, I beg; the pleasure of staying with you, of seeing the spectacle of a village party, is all we want," said Virginie. But the old woman turned a deaf ear and went to prepare a chamber for her guests, while Denise lighted a great lamp to illuminate the living-room; for it was growing dark, and the party would soon begin.

During these preparations Virginie whispered to her friend:

"These good people take us for princesses."

"Well, it theemth to me that I cut a pretty good figure."

"Yes, but don't make stupid remarks at the party. For my part, I like it here very much; I would willingly spend a fortnight here."

"It thertainly wouldn't coht much to live here."

"But if all the men are as agreeable as neighbor Mauflard, they must be a lively set of fellows."

Night came, and the regular party-goers, who had arranged to meet at Mère Fourcy's on that evening, began to arrive. One old woman brought her spinning-wheel, another her knitting; many brought nothing, because they were to tell stories, which are of no small importance at a village party. The men brought bottles and pitchers, and every one was provided with his own supper.

Virginie and Cézarine, seated in a corner of the main room, where it was not very light, despite the lamp, scrutinized the villagers and made comments which luckily they did not hear.

"Oh! what funny creatures!" said Virginie. "Don't they look countrified! I'd like to show them stars on the ceiling!"

"Oh! thethe village folkth are more knowing than they look."

"I'll bet that I play a trick on 'em and fool 'em all."

"Virginie, you mutht behave yourthelf, you know."

"That's all right, Semiramis, I know how to behave."

"Look at that tall young fellow over there—he'th a handthome man. He hath Théodore'th legth."

"He looks like a terrible fool!"

"I don't care for that—he ithn't a bit bad-looking."

When they first entered the room, the villagers did not notice the two Parisian ladies; but when they did see them, they gathered in groups and began to whisper together. C  zarine walked toward them and said with an amiable air:

"We don't wish to embarrath you, worthy villagerth; we have come to take part in your games."

"We're very fond of country life," said Virginie; "and before buying a farm, we want to know what people do on farms."

M  re Fourcy's arrival gave the villagers all the information they desired.

"They're great ladies from Paris," she told them. "They have a beautiful house, but they ain't a bit proud; they decided to pass the night here, so's to be at the party. You'll see how polite they are."

The peasants bowed low to the great ladies; some young gallants of the village, in order to win favor with the strangers at once, began to push one another and exchange fisticuffs, and yelled with delight when one of them fell to the floor.

"Our youngsters are beginning their fooling," said the old men; and Virginie remarked to her friend:

"If they begin like this, I wonder where they'll end!"

Amid the uproar, Monsieur Mauflard continued to snore in his chair; and one of the village wits exclaimed:

"Look—P  re Mauflard's asleep. I say! we must put up a game on P  re Mauflard. What do you say?"

"Count me in on that," said C  zarine, seating herself beside the tall, gawky youth whom she considered handsome, and who lowered his eyes and flushed to the ears when the lady from Paris looked at him.

"What shall we do to P  re Mauflard?" asked a peasant.

"Take his hat."

"Oh! that ain't funny enough."

"Steal his handkerchief."

"Or his snuff-box."

"Oh! he'll guess right off that it was us who took that. That ain't a good trick."

"Do you want a good trick?" asked C  zarine; "if you do, jutht quietly take off his breecheth."

All the villagers gazed at one another in amazement, for the trick proposed by the lovely Parisian seemed rather strong to them; and Virginie trod on her friend's foot and whispered:

"Will you keep quiet? What are you thinking about? As if anyone ever did such things as that here!—My friends," Virginie continued, addressing the villagers, "my cousin said that because she assumed that P  re Mauflard wears drawers."

"Oh, yes! but he don't!" said a stout woman, laughingly. Whereupon all the peasants cried:

"Oho! Fanchon knows all about it! How do you know that, eh, Fanchon? Well, on my word! it seems that Fanchon—So you know that, do you, Fanchon?"

Fanchon laughed on, and the noise finally woke P  re Mauflard, who rubbed his eyes and asked what the matter was.

But Denise's aunt restored order by arranging the whole party in a circle. The seats of honor by the fireplace were offered to the two ladies. C  zarine, who had seated herself beside the tall lout, said that she was very comfortable and that the heat made her ill. Virginie sat between two old men. Denise took Coco in her lap; she alone had no share in the pleasures of the occasion, and her heart as well as her thoughts bore her far from the village.

An old woman began a tale of robbers; another told a ghost story; and as neither of them interested Cézarine, while the simple folk tremblingly huddled together, she played games with the tall youth, and chucked him under the chin, saying:

“How much he looks like Théodore!”

An old peasant took the floor and announced that he proposed to sing the lament composed on the extraordinary death of Etienne de Garlande, formerly lord of Livry, who espoused the cause of Amaury de Montfort against Louis le Gros; the lament had only seventy-two stanzas.

As each stanza, sung to a most doleful tune in the measure of *Malbrouck*, lasted nearly five minutes, Virginie rose at the second, took a candle, whispered to Mère Fourcy that she was going to bed, and vanished without diverting the peasants' attention from the dirge.

But Cézarine, who was not at all anxious to listen to the seventy-two stanzas, interrupted the peasant in the middle of the fourth, saying:

“My dear friend, your thory ith very pretty, but it will end by putting everybody to thleep like neighbor Mauflard, who hath been thnoring for an hour. If you thay tho, I'll give you a then from a tragedy. Do you know what tragedy ith, my friendth?”

“No, madame,” said the villagers.

“And comedy—have you ever been to one?”

“No, madame.”

“Oh! I know what it is,” said one of the young blades; “I've been in Paris. It's a place where you see men and women behind a curtain that goes up; and then there's lamps, and they say silly things and wave their arms about, and you can't understand nothing at all; but it's almighty fine.”

"That'th the very thing, my dear boy; you know all about it. Tho you'll be able to explain to the company what they can't grathp right away. I'm going to give you a thene from *Andromaque*. Come with me, my fine fellow, you're going to be Pyrrhuth."

Cézarine took the tall youth by the arm, placed a wooden bench at the rear of the room, unfolded her shawl and draped it round her body, and removed one of her garters, which she knotted about the young peasant's brow; he allowed himself to be thus decorated, not daring to stir. The peasants, their eyes fixed on Cézarine, waited impatiently to see what she was going to do. After removing her hat and arranging her hair on top of her head, Cézarine ordered the tall youth to stand on one end of the bench and took her own place on the other end, saying:

"Now we're going to begin. But firht I think I ought to tell you a little about the thubject of the play. Lithen: *Andromaque* ith a queen whothe huthband hath been killed; Pyrrhuth here wantht to marry her, and the won't. That'th the whole of it—now you underhtand; don't you?"

"Yes, yes," said the peasants; "anyway Jean-François 'll explain the rest."

"All right. I'll begin; and you, Pyrrhuth, do me the favor not to keep your eyeth on your big toe all the time, for Pyrrhuth ought not to look like a zany."

The gawky youth, in order to obey the lovely lady, at whom he dared not glance, raised his eyes and thereafter did not take them from the ceiling.

Cézarine assumed a noble pose and began:

"And what more wouldht thou I should thay to him?
 Author of all my illth, thinkht thou he knowth them not?
 My lord, thee to what low ethtate thou doht reduth me.

I have theen my father dead, and our abode on fire ;
 I have theen the liveth of my whole family in peril,
 And my blood-thtained huthband dragged amid the dutht."

"Poor soul! think of her seeing all that!" said the peasant women. "Is that all true, Jean-François?"

"Yes, yes! of course it's true! Don't she tell you she saw it?"

"My children," said Cézarine, "if you interrupt me, I than't be inthpired any more; a little thilence, if you pleathe."

"I breathe again, I therve ;
 I have done more, thometimeth I have ta'en comfort
 Becauthe my fate hath exiled me here and not elthwhere ;
 Becauthe, happy in my mithery, the thon of tho many kingth,
 Thinthe he mutht therve, hath fallen beneath your thway ;
 I have thought that hith prithon would become hith refuge ;
 Of yore the conquered Priam wath by Achilleth thpared ;
 I from hith thon e'en greater kindneth did antithipate.
 Forgive me, Hector dear ——"

"Friend Pyrrhuth, pray attend to bithneth. Are you looking for thpiderth on the theiling?"

The tall youth looked toward the door, and Cézarine resumed:

"Forgive me, Hector dear ——"

"Thilenth, my children," she said, pausing again; "I beg the perthon who ith thnoring tho loud to do me the favor to go."

Cézarine was about to continue her declamation when there came another prolonged groan. All the villagers looked at one another, saying:

"Who on earth is making such a noise as that?"

"It ain't me."

"Nor me."

"Nor it ain't Père Mauflard neither."

Another groan woke the echoes of the living-room. Terror was depicted on every face, and the peasants crowded closer together.

"Great God! what can that be?" they exclaimed.

"You are frightened at nothing at all," said Cézarine; "it'th thome brute prowling round the yard."

"Oh! that ain't no brute's voice, I tell you! it's more like some dead man's soul."

"I say! perhaps it's Jacques Ledru, as died a week ago!"

"Ain't it more like to be the ghost of Mère Lucas, who was so ugly when she was living? Perhaps she's bent on tormenting us still."

To set their minds at rest, Cézarine was on the point of resuming her tirade, when the gawky youth, whose eyes were fixed on the door, uttered a horrible yell and fell from the bench, thereby causing Andromaque to fall upon him.

"What is it? what's the matter?" cried the terrified peasants in chorus.

The tall youth, who had not the strength to speak, pointed to the door; then hid his face in his hands. All the villagers looked at the place at which he pointed: the door was thrown open, disclosing in the doorway a white phantom of extraordinary size, whose eyes flashed fire.

At that horrible sight, all the women uttered heart-rending shrieks and tumbled over one another in their haste to get away from the door. Most of the men did the same, shouting: "Let's get out of this!" But, as they could not escape by the door, where the phantom stood on guard, they pushed one another toward the end of the room; and in the hurly-burly, chairs and benches were overturned, as well as the table that held the lamp,

which fell to the floor and was extinguished. The sudden darkness added to the general alarm; those who had not seen the lamp fall thought that the phantom had caused that terrifying obscurity by his mere presence; the shrieks redoubled; it was impossible to see, they fell over one another, and everyone thought that it was the devil falling upon him. To add still more to their terror the phantom uttered blood-curdling grunts and piteous groans.

The confusion lasted several minutes, the peasants shrieking in terror and offering up prayers. Mademoiselle C  zarine alone was not heard to bewail her fate, although she too had fallen, with the tall youth. The latter had the courage to look toward the door, where he saw the gleaming-eyed phantom.

"It's still there!" he said under his breath; "it don't go away!"

Whereupon Mademoiselle C  zarine was heard to say in a stifled voice:

"Don't thtir, my children, and above all thingth, don't light any candleth, or the devil will come and carry uth off!"

Suddenly the barking of a dog was heard in the yard; it was soon followed by yells from the phantom, who was struggling with the beast and calling the peasants to its assistance.

"M  re Fourcy, call off your dog, for heaven's sake! What an ugly beast! he's biting my legs! Come and drive him away, C  zarine!"

That voice, which was recognized as belonging to Virginie, put an end to the terror of the peasants, who began to suspect that they had been fooled by the young ladies from Paris; to put them entirely at ease, the dog pulled off the sheet in which Virginie had enveloped

herself, and took in his jaws a lantern which she had placed on her head, wrapping the sheet about it and allowing the light to shine through two small holes.

The dog raced about the room with the lantern, and the light disclosed a ridiculous tableau. The men and women were inextricably commingled, and, even without mischievous intention, the proprieties had not been altogether respected, because, when one is frightened, one conceals oneself as best one can. The position of Cézarine and the tall youth was the most equivocal; but the light of the lantern lighted the room but dimly, and there were many things which there was no time to see. They began by setting free Père Mauflard, who had a table, two benches and three nurses upon him; then the lamp was relighted and they could recognize one another. Amid the tumult Denise had remained quietly in a corner with Coco; but, on hearing Virginie's shrieks, she flew to her assistance and helped her to rid herself of the sheet in which she was entangled.

"Why! was it you playing ghost?" inquired the young girl.

"Yes, my dear, I thought I'd act a scene from a fairy pantomime for you; and if it hadn't been for your infernal dog, who jumped at—at the base of my back, while I was giving a groan, I'd have frightened you a great deal worse!"

"Oh! what a pity!" said Cézarine, with a languishing glance at the gawky youth, "it was so nithe! I'm very fond of fairy thenes."

"Your fairy scene is to blame for my being all bruised up," said Père Mauflard.

The peasants, offended because they had been made game of, refused to prolong the festivity, and left Mère Fourcy's house, saying:

“What do fine ladies like them amount to anyway! one wants to see Père Mauflard’s drawers, and the other dresses up as a ghost; they act as if they was pretty gay girls!”

When the neighbors had gone, no one thought of anything but retiring. Virginie and her friend went to their chamber and to bed, and soon fell asleep, one nursing her bites, the other lisping that the tall young man had many of Théodore’s attributes. Mère Fourcy and Coco went to sleep also. Denise alone could obtain no rest; she thought constantly of Auguste, of the change in his fortunes, and of what she could do for him to prove her friendship. But she no longer felt any inclination to ask the advice of the ladies from Paris, because all the foolish antics in which she had seen them indulge had somewhat lessened her esteem for them. She felt that she must be guided by her heart alone; she was sure that it would never give her any advice for which she would need to blush.

The next morning, after breakfast, the ladies, being already sadly bored in the country, where they desired at first to pass a fortnight, bade Mère Fourcy and Denise adieu and took their places in the Paris coach.

“Ah! my dear,” said Virginie, “how I long to be in Paris! it seems to me that it’s six months since I saw Rue Montmartre and the Ambigu-Comique.”

“What do you think of me, who haven’t theen Théodore for twenty-four hourth!”

“Say what you will, there’s no place but Paris for fun and dress and the theatre and punch!”

“Ah! if I had to live in the country, I thould die there!”

XIX

A MAN IN A THOUSAND

After his visit to the old man on the fifth floor, Auguste had made a vow to be prudent and to profit by the lesson which the unfortunate Dorfeuill had unconsciously given him. But an old proverb says: "Drive away the natural, and it returns at a gallop;" and Auguste's nature still impelled him to do foolish things. Moreover, being unable thenceforth, by reason of an instinctive delicacy for which he cannot be blamed, to seek diversion at his window, he was driven to seek it elsewhere. From his more prosperous days Auguste had retained the habit of playing the grand seigneur, of reckoning the cost of nothing, of following only his first impulse. He was as generous to the unfortunate as to his mistresses: to confer pleasure on others is such a gratifying habit that it is very hard to abandon it. There are people, however, who have never known that gratification.

Upon examining his cash-box, Bertrand had discovered the enormous deficit consequent upon Auguste's visit to the old man. Unable to understand how his master could have spent so much money in so short a time, Bertrand concluded that they had been robbed, and made an infernal row. He proposed to go down and cudgel Schtrack and his wife, to teach them to allow thieves to enter the house; but Auguste detained him, saying:

"Don't get excited, my dear fellow, we haven't been robbed."

"Why, monsieur, we had about ten thousand francs left three days ago; now I can find only seven—and you say we haven't been robbed!"

"No, Bertrand; it was I who took the money."

"Oh! excuse me, lieutenant; if you have got it, that's different."

"I don't say that I have it; I tell you that I had a use for it."

"A thousand crowns in three days! you're doing well, lieutenant. I don't quite see why we came up to the fifth floor, for you didn't spend any more on the first."

"I met an old friend, Bertrand,—he was in destitution."

"We may very well be there, too, and it won't be long either, if we go on at this rate. Excuse me, lieutenant, I know how generous you are, I know your kind heart; but still you must remember that you haven't twenty thousand francs a year any more; and when you can't have anything but a piece of beef for dinner, it don't seem to me that it's the time to give other people partridges."

"Don't be angry, Bertrand; I am going to be prudent—yes, miserly."

"Miserly! nonsense, lieutenant! you'll never have that fault! In fact, I don't believe it would help us now."

"I am not without prospects; I am promised a place in a government office."

"Really?"

"With a salary of six thousand francs."

"Impossible!"

"Quite possible, on the contrary; but you see everything in dark colors."

"It is you who see everything in rose color, monsieur."

"If that place should fail me, it is probable that I shall go into a banking-house, as bookkeeper."

"Did you ever keep books, monsieur?"

"No; but what difference does that make? Do you suppose that one has to study for a place like that, as one would study mechanics? With a neat handwriting, familiarity with rates of exchange and mathematics, and a little intelligence, you can fill any sort of clerkship. I know that there are people who study two or three years to learn how to copy a letter, and others who consider themselves Archimedeses, Newtons or Galileos, because they pass their lives doing sums."

"It seems to me, monsieur, that when a man has a place, he ought to work."

"Very well, I will work, Bertrand; that won't trouble me any. I have done nothing, because I had nothing to do; but the moment I have employment, you will see how ardently I will go at my work. Ah! I wish I were there now!"

"So do I, monsieur; in the first place, because you would be earning money, and in the second place, because, when a man is busy, he does fewer foolish things. Who is it who is going to get these places for you?"

"For the first one, a lovely woman, who has a cousin who's very intimate with the minister's secretary. Oh! I tell you, Bertrand, these women—they're the only ones to obtain things; and, say what you will, their acquaintance isn't always a burden; when they take a person under their protection, they go about it with such zeal, such ardor, that they can't fail."

"And the other place, lieutenant—is it a woman who is going to obtain that for you, too?"

"No, it's a young man, with whom I have dined quite often—an excellent fellow, and most obliging. His uncle is partner in a bank; he has promised to speak to him about me, and the first vacant place will be given me."

"That would come in very handily, monsieur."

"But you must see that, in order to make yourself agreeable to those whose support you require, there is always more or less money to be spent: with the charming young woman, it's theatre parties and little presents; with the young man, luncheons and dinners to be given him; for it isn't fashionable to help people unless you believe them to be in comfortable circumstances."

"I understand: one must be ruined altogether before one has any resources."

"That is called sowing that you may reap."

"You've been sowing a good long time, monsieur."

"I tell you that within a fortnight I shall have employment."

"When that day comes I'll go for a walk with Schtrack."

"Give me some money, Bertrand."

"Money, monsieur?"

"Yes, Eugène is going to dine with me to-day; he's the young man whose uncle is a banker. To-night I am going to call on the charmer whose cousin is to say a good word for me. There will be cards, no doubt, and if I have the look of being hard up and of being afraid to lose a few francs, people won't condescend to look at me."

"Ah, yes, I understand; you want money, so that you can sow."

"Yes, my friend."

After filling his purse, Auguste went to meet the friend with whom he had an appointment, and whom he was to entertain at dinner, together with several others who might possibly be useful to him. Dalville took his guests to one of the very best restaurants; he would have felt ashamed to dine at a place where they would have been

as comfortable and as well served at less expense, but which was not so highly considered in fashionable society. During dinner they thought of nothing but laughing and joking, and Auguste was very careful not to mention his desire for employment; that would have seemed to indicate that he was in straitened circumstances, which would produce an ill effect. Not until the dessert, while they were drinking their champagne, did Eugène say to Auguste:

“Are you still wanting something to do?”

“Why, yes; I am tired to death of idleness; I am sick of a life of pleasure.”

“That’s a good idea; work—it will be a little change for you, and it helps to reform wayward youth. My uncle will think so. I’ll speak to him about you when I see him.”

Auguste dared not say that he would like to have him make a point of seeing his uncle. The young men, having had an excellent dinner, left Auguste, making all sorts of proffers of service, and renewing their assurances of devotion; and he betook himself to the lovely woman who had promised to assist him and who was to have mentioned him to her cousin.

Ladies are beyond question better advocates than men; it certainly is easier for them to succeed, for they obtain with a smile what has been denied again and again to obscure merit, to shamefaced poverty. This fact does credit to our gallantry at least, if not to our justice, and it is in human nature to submit to be seduced by beauty.

Madame Valmont was greatly interested in Auguste, who accompanied her excellently on the piano, and sang nocturnes in her salon with excellent taste. She had kept her word by inviting her cousin that evening, in order to introduce Auguste to him. The cousin was a

man of fashion, who was received in the best society; addicted to making promises freely and forgetting on the morrow what he had promised the night before; but desirous of playing the patron even when he did not patronize, and deeming himself a mortal of superior mould before whom everyone should bow.

Having listened to Auguste's rendition of a nocturne, he informed his cousin that he sang divinely and that he would be delighted to do something for him. When he said this, the cousin expected very humble acknowledgments from Auguste; but our friend was not the man to bend the knee in order to obtain favors from anyone. The man who is conscious of his own worth never stoops to humble himself before his fellowmen, and to lavish obsequious flattery on those whose merit consists solely in their rank and wealth—very slender merit indeed in the eyes of those whose deserts are genuine, but very great in the eyes of the multitude, who prostrate themselves before fine clothes, decorations and the glitter of gold pieces, and would dance under a monkey's window if the monkey would toss money to them. *Numerus stultorum est infinitus.*

Auguste, who was not of the right temperament to dance for a monkey, did not lavish compliments on the cousin with the air of beseeching his patronage; and the cousin, who was accustomed to be lauded and fawned upon by the poor devils who desired his countenance, was amazed that the young gentleman who had been commended to his attention, did not fulfil his devoirs by paying homage to him. So that he began to consider that Dalville was not such a good singer after all; and to put the finishing touch to his disgust, Auguste, who had bet on him when he took his seat at the écarté table, presumed to criticise his style of play and to try to prove

to him that he lost a game by his stupidity. The cousin was exasperated, and he left his cousin's house, declaring that the young man whom she had taken under her protection was incapable of filling the most trivial office in the service of the government.

"Well!" said Auguste to Madame Valmont, at the end of the evening, "when may I call upon the minister's secretary?"

"Really, I don't know what to say. My cousin did not seem very well disposed when he went away. But what a strange man you are! Instead of trying to make a favorable impression on him, you expressed an opinion contrary to his several times, you said nothing agreeable to him, and you annoyed him at the card table."

"Oh, yes, madame, I understand: I am not worthy of an office because I did not cringe and crawl, and because I presumed to demonstrate to that gentleman that he did wrong to play his second queen."

"I don't say that, my dear Auguste. However, it was a mere spasm of ill-temper; I will see my cousin again and speak to him, and I still have hopes."

"No, madame, don't take any more trouble. I am touched by your interest in me, but I would rather be unemployed than pose as the humble servant of idiocy and self-conceit."

Auguste went home, raging against the vanity, arrogance and pettiness of mankind. Bertrand, who was impatiently awaiting his return, called out as soon as he appeared:

"Well! what about that government office, monsieur?"

"My friend," said Auguste, squeezing Bertrand's hand, "we will eat black bread, we will drink water, but I will not be the lackey of men whom I despise; I will not

burn incense to insolent pride and stupidity! I will not debase myself before my fellowmen!"

"No, ten thousand squadrons! You mustn't do that, lieutenant. I see the place has gone to the devil, eh?"

"I must needs do homage to a fellow who assumed the most patronizing airs; agree with everything he said, even when it lacked common sense; and even say that he played well when, by his own stupid play, he caused me to lose thirty francs that I had bet!"

"Thirty francs at one crack! That was rather a big stake, lieutenant."

"What would you have? I was determined to test my luck."

"But black bread and water make a wretched meal."

"I still have some hope. Eugène is going to speak to his uncle, and perhaps I shall have better luck in that direction."

Several weeks passed, and Auguste finally met his friend, who said to him:

"I have spoken to my uncle; you can go to see him—I believe that he has a vacant place."

The next morning Auguste called upon the gentleman referred to. He entered the office and in due time reached the sanctum of Eugène's uncle, who was seated at his desk writing, and, without looking up, motioned to Auguste to wait.

Auguste, receiving no invitation to be seated, began by taking a chair and stretched out his legs, already looking with disfavor upon the gentleman who was not courteous enough to offer him a seat.

Five minutes passed and still the banker wrote on. Auguste, losing patience, said at last:

"Monsieur, I came here to apply for employment; Eugène must have told you——"

"One moment—I will be at your service directly, monsieur; I am very busy."

Five minutes more passed, and Auguste said to himself:

"The devil! I chose my time very badly. Is the man going to write like this for an hour? His business must be very important!"

But, after five minutes more, another person entered the office and went up to the gentleman who was writing.

"Good-morning, my dear fellow," he said. "Ah! you are engaged? Very well! I'll come again."

The gentleman at once laid aside his pen, rose, and detained the new arrival, saying:

"Why, is it you, my friend? Don't go, deuce take it! No one ever sees you now! I dined yesterday with someone who talked to me about you. Well, have you sold that cargo of Martinique coffee, the price of which I predicted would fall?"

The newcomer was about to reply when Auguste, rising, walked between him and the banker, and having put on his hat, said to the latter:

"Monsieur, you have kept me waiting for half an hour, unable to give me a minute, and you have the impertinence to enter into conversation in my presence with this gentleman who has just arrived! I have only this much to say to you—that you're a knave and a rascal! If you can find time to answer that, here's my address, and I shall expect to hear from you."

With that Auguste stalked from the room, leaving the *busy* gentleman utterly bewildered by the compliment paid to him, and unable to find a word to say in reply.

Again Bertrand was awaiting his master's return; but when Auguste appeared, the other divined the result of his quest. The young man's eyes shone with anger.

"Black bread and water, eh, monsieur?" asked Bertrand.

"Yes, my friend, yes. Ah! these men! Upon my word, I have good grounds for becoming a misanthrope. I have never known the world so well as since I lost my money. Parvenus who think that they may presume to go any length because they are millionaires! Men of intellect who think of nobody but themselves, and who, provided that they are coddled and amused, show the most absolute indifference to everything else! People with the most polished manners who cheat you out of your money! Conceited asses who want to be flattered, fools who flatter them, parasites who suck your blood, swindlers who ruin you, and men who turn their backs on you when you're unlucky! Those are what I see now. And they are just what have always been seen, so 'tis said. Men are the same everywhere; they were no different before the Flood, and the study of history is simply the study of the passions which have ruled the actions of the human race for ages."

"In all this, my lieutenant, you forget the women, who——"

"Ah! let us say no ill of them, my friend, they are a hundred times better than we. Do we not find enjoyment even with those whom we deceive? That is one pleasant memory, at all events, of which misfortune cannot deprive us."

"That reminds me, monsieur, that Mademoiselle Virginie came to see you to-day."

"Poor Virginie! she doesn't know as yet of the change in my fortunes. Well! what did she say, Bertrand?"

"She said, first of all, that it wouldn't be well for an asthmatic subject to come up so high; then she asked me whether you had come up so many flights so that you

could go down in a parachute; but when I told her how you had been swindled, why, I must do her the justice to say that she seemed deeply moved; she shed some tears and asked me for a glass of kirsch to pull her together. She's coming to breakfast with you some morning."

"I shall be very glad to see her; she, at all events, won't avoid me when she meets me."

"And those good people at Montfermeil—pretty Denise—do you think, monsieur, that they wouldn't be glad to see you again?"

"I am afraid that the cold welcome I gave Denise when she came to Paris——"

"She won't remember, monsieur, when she finds out that you're unfortunate. And that child you're so fond of—that you think is such a fine little fellow—why not go to see him?"

"Why? You seem to forget, Bertrand, that I can no longer do anything for him! I promised to educate him, to take charge of his future—and all my plans are destroyed!"

"But I should say, monsieur, that you have already done a great deal for the little fellow; instead of coming to Paris, he will remain in the village, and he won't be any worse off for that."

Auguste could not make up his mind to appear in the guise of a ruined man to the good people who had seen him scattering gold in profusion; a false shame deterred him from going again to the village, and he who had just been declaiming against the passions of men showed that he was not himself exempt from pride and vanity.

Auguste left Bertrand and went out in search of distraction and to dispel the black mood to which his reflections gave birth. Bertrand, left alone, reflected that

all hopes of employment had vanished, and said to himself:

"What are we going to do when we haven't anything left, which won't be long? Shall I let him live on black bread and water? *Sacrebleu!* no, that shall never be! I am not capable of filling a clerk's place—besides, he wouldn't want me to leave him—but can't I work without his suspecting it?"

Bertrand thought a few moments, scratched his head, then exclaimed joyfully: "Why the devil didn't I think of it sooner?" Then he went slowly downstairs and hunted up his friend Schtrack.

"You make breeches, old fellow, don't you?" said Bertrand to the concierge; "in fact, you're a tailor——"

"Ja."

"Do you always have plenty of work?"

"Ja, I haf more than I can do."

"That's because you don't often work. Are you willing to give me some?"

"Preeches?"

"Whatever you choose, so long as I have work to do. I shall make a mess of it at first, but you can show me and I'll do better soon. You see, I'm anxious to work, I'm no more of a fool than you are, and it seems to me that I can do whatever you do. So you'll give me some work, will you?"

"*Sacretié!* Monsieur Pertrand, do you mean it?"

"Why, yes; I want to do something; I am tired of sitting all day with my arms folded; so I'll fold my legs, that will be a change. Is it agreed?"

"Ja, Monsieur Pertrand."

"That's good; but not a word of this before my master, or I'll begin my apprenticeship by sewing up your tongue."

"I won't say ein wort."

That same evening, as soon as Dalville had gone out, Bertrand went down to the concierge's quarters, and, seating himself in a small room behind the lodge, went to work with great zeal. At first the ex-corporal had much ado to use a needle, and he frequently thrust it into his finger; but when Schtrack said: "You've hurt yourself, mein friend!" Bertrand rejoined: "Don't you suppose a bayonet hurt more than that?"

Bertrand passed a large part of the day at work and sometimes he worked very late. By dint of application, he began to make himself useful; he earned very little, but he hoped to become more skilful in time.

Auguste had no suspicion of anything; he was rarely at home and never inquired what Bertrand was doing. But, when he looked at his faithful companion, he noticed that his eyes were very red and that he had a tired look.

"You're not sick, are you, my friend?" he asked.

"I, monsieur—I was never so well."

"You have a tired look, and your eyes seem weak."

"Oh! that's because I read a great deal at night."

"I didn't know that you were so fond of reading."

"That depends on the book, monsieur; I'm reading the life of the great Turenne."

"You must know it by heart."

"I never get tired of it, monsieur."

Auguste asked no more questions. Some time after, one night when he could not sleep because, with all his philosophy, his reflections were beginning to be less cheerful, Auguste got out of bed and determined to try reading himself. He went to Bertrand's room to get a light, and was amazed to find that his companion was absent. Bertrand's bed was not disturbed, so that he had not retired; and yet it was late when Auguste came home,

and Bertrand was apparently waiting for him to come in before going to bed.

That midnight absence disturbed Auguste. He had no idea that his faithful follower would go about to wine-shops with Schtrack, in their present condition, and as he wished to find out at what time Bertrand left the house, he went downstairs, having decided to rouse Schtrack if necessary; he was determined to learn what had become of Bertrand.

It was three o'clock in the morning and everybody in the house was asleep, but Auguste saw a light in the concierge's lodge; the door was ajar and the light came from the room at the rear. Auguste went in and discovered Bertrand seated on a table beside the sleeping Schtrack, working resolutely on a piece of cloth in which his tired eyes could hardly follow the threads which were his guide.

At sight of his master, Bertrand stopped, crestfallen. Auguste was so moved that he stood for some moments unable to speak. At last he cried:

"What! you, working, Bertrand? Have you turned tailor?"

"Why not, monsieur? I handled a musket a long while, and now I am handling a needle; they say that an honest man honors whatever he touches."

"And you pass your nights working! you are ruining your eyesight in order to work a little more!"

"This is a mere chance, monsieur; there was a piece of work to be done in a hurry to-night, and I thought—But it's the first time, I swear!"

"Oh! don't try to deceive me any more! It's for me that you sit up all night and deprive yourself of rest. It's to spin out our funds a little longer that you are ruining your health. And I—I pass my days in idleness; I

squander in an hour or two what you work like a dog as many nights to earn."

"No, monsieur, no, I work because I like it, because it amuses me; and if I should try to be less of a burden to you, would there be any harm in that? Haven't you been doing everything for me for a long time? and do you propose to forbid your old comrade to do something for you?"

Auguste could not reply, but he opened his arms to Bertrand and pressed him to his heart; then he forced his faithful servant to go upstairs with him and go to bed.

The next day, at daybreak, Auguste sent for an upholsterer.

"What idea have you got in your head now, monsieur?" queried Bertrand.

"I mean to sell our furniture, turn everything we own into cash, and then leave Paris and seek in some other land a means of turning to account such talents as I have. You will go with me, won't you, Bertrand?"

"Anywhere, monsieur, anywhere you choose. But why this sudden decision? Couldn't you do it without leaving Paris?"

"No, my friend; in this city, where I have lived the life of a man of wealth, it would be hard for me, I know, to turn my trifling talents to account. Forgive this last exhibition of weakness."

"Before we resort to this step, is there no longer any hope of your finding employment?"

"Hope is the very thing that is using up what little means I have left. Besides, here in Paris I am not able to resist my taste for dissipation. Perhaps I shall be wiser in some other country. So we must make our preparations to start. If this experiment isn't successful at all events it's proper to make it."

"But, lieutenant——"

"No objections, Bertrand. Your conduct suggested mine, and my mind is made up. We leave Paris to-morrow."

Bertrand saw that it was indeed useless for him to try to combat his master's plan; he realized too that it was the only course that remained for them to take, for he could not long support his master with the twenty sous that he earned by tailoring. So that he set about making preparations for departure.

Auguste, who liked to carry out his plans promptly when he had determined upon them, effected a sale of his furniture during the day, and the proceeds, added to what cash he had left, made about six thousand francs.

"I should like to know," he said to Bertrand, "if, with this amount of money, we can't go to the ends of the world in search of fortune?"

"It is certain, lieutenant, that there are a great many people who began with much less."

When everything was ready, Auguste, who proposed to go first to Italy, engaged seats in the Lyon diligence. Bertrand went to say good-bye to Schtrack.

"Farewell, old fellow," he said; "we're going round the world; if I come back, I'll have another drink with you."

"Sacretié! Good-bye, Monsieur Pertrand."

XX

POOR DENISE

Auguste and Bertrand had been gone several hours, and Schtrack was standing in the doorway trying to catch another glimpse of them, when a young village maiden, carrying a large bag of money in one hand, rushed into the courtyard and asked for Monsieur Dalville.

"Monsieur Dalville?" repeated Schtrack, taking his pipe from his mouth; "he isn't here any more, mamzelle."

"Not here! What do you mean, monsieur? This is certainly where he lived. I came here once before. You remember the time, don't you—when you wouldn't let me go upstairs?"

"Ah, ja! You had a little poy mit you then."

"Yes, monsieur. But where does Monsieur Dalville live now? Do you know, monsieur? It is absolutely necessary that I should see him and speak to him! Oh! if I only could have got this money sooner—what I owe him! But tell me, monsieur,—must I go somewhere else?"

"My little mamzelle, I don't think you will find Monsieur Dalville very easy."

"Why not, monsieur? I am ready to go anywhere—no matter where."

"I tell you it's too late. How do you expect to find the address of a man who's going round the world?"

"What's that?—Monsieur Auguste——"

"He started off this very day mit my friend Pertrand."

"Gone!"

"Ach ja! He got ruined here, so he's going to try to make a fortune somewhere else."

"He has gone away! You don't know where he is?"

"Yes, I do—don't I tell you he's gone round the world?"

"Oh! how unlucky! I have come too late!"

With that Denise lost consciousness and fell; but Schtrack caught her in his arms, and after laying his pipe on the post, carried her into the house. He took her into his lodge. When she swooned, the girl dropped the bag that she carried; it burst, and the five-franc pieces rolled about the courtyard. Schtrack, sorely embarrassed because he happened to be alone for the moment, ran from Denise to the money and from the money to his pipe, crying:

"Sacretié! this girl has to go and faint just when my wife ain't in! Well, well! my pipe's gone out, and the money's rolling all about! Sacretié!"

Luckily for the old German and for Denise, another lady entered the house at this juncture. It was Made-moiselle Virginie, who had come to invite herself to breakfast with Auguste, and who, when she saw the five-franc pieces scattered about the courtyard, exclaimed in surprise:

"Mon Dieu! what magnificence! They throw money out o'window here! I seem to have come just in time."

"Don't touch! don't touch!" cried Schtrack from his lodge; "it belongs to this girl who won't open her eyes."

"Well, old Dutchman, am I touching your money? What an uncivil old villain it is! What do you take me for, Monsieur Helvetian?—What girl can he be talking about?"

And as she spoke, Virginie walked toward the lodge, and she uttered a cry of surprise when she saw the young girl from Montfermeil, whom Schtrack was drenching with vinegar.

"It's Denise! it's my poor Denise!" she said, pushing Schtrack aside and taking charge of the young woman.

"Poor Denise! She ain't so poor, for I tell you that bag of crowns is hers," said Schtrack, returning to the courtyard to recover his pipe and pick up the money.

Virginie's efforts were soon successful in restoring Denise to consciousness. When she opened her eyes they rested on Virginie, and she exclaimed, sobbing bitterly:

"Oh! he has gone away, madame!"

"Who, pray, my dear love?"

"Monsieur Auguste."

"Auguste gone away! nonsense! he'll come back, of course, won't he?"

"Oh, no, madame! I shall never see him again. He's gone a long way."

"I say, Dutchman, is it true that Auguste has left Paris?"

"Ja! ja! he's gone round the world with Pertrand."

"Round the world! Great God! And I came to ask him to invite me to breakfast! Come, my little Denise, don't cry like that!—Poor child! she makes me feel sad.—So you loved Auguste, did you, my dear child?"

"Oh, yes, madame!"

"There! I knew it! she loved him! I suspected as much.—And he swore that he loved you too, of course; for these villains of men, they swear to that as if they were just saying good-morning."

"No, madame, Auguste didn't love me, I'm very sure of that!"

"Then it's very kind of you to weep for him."

"Oh! I can't help it."

"I know well enough that love is stronger than we are. I know all about that! I have been through it. There are men that one can't help persisting in loving.—And you came to Paris to see him?"

"Yes, madame, and to give him this money. When you came to see me three weeks ago, you told us that Monsieur Auguste was ruined. I didn't know anything about it before."

"Yes, yes, I remember; and I played ghost; and if it hadn't been for your dog nipping the calf of my leg, I'd have had the whole village in the air."

"Last summer Monsieur Auguste gave me a thousand crowns for little Coco; but he was rich then; to-day, as he isn't rich any more, it seemed to me that I ought to give back that money. We had used it for building a cottage and laying out a garden; but I made my aunt understand that we mustn't tell Monsieur Auguste that we had used the money at all. My aunt's kindhearted too. Besides, it was no more than our duty. As I succeeded in getting the last of the money yesterday, I started to bring it to him right away. I came alone so as not to be delayed, and after all I got here too late! He has gone, and he isn't coming back again!"

Denise began to cry again, while Schtrack returned with the money and handed it to her, saying:

"There ain't a single one missing; count 'em, mamzelle."

"Alas! what shall I do with it now? This money was for him," said Denise.

"You had better take it home again, my child; a person can never have too much of it," Virginie replied, while Schtrack, still holding the bag, repeated:

"Count 'em, mamzelle, if you please."

"Don't you see that she don't want to count it, you pig-headed old fool?" said Virginie. "We all know that the Dutchman is honest."

"Never mind, count just the same, mamzelle, if you please."

Virginie decided to count the money, because Schtrack would not otherwise have left them in peace. Meanwhile Denise said to the concierge:

"Did Monsieur Auguste look very sad when he went away, monsieur?"

"Sad? no, mamzelle, he was fery glad to go, judging from what he said."

"I'll bet he's gone to pick up a legacy," said Virginie, "and that's why he went off so sudden. Didn't he tell you so, Dutchman?"

"No, he haf not said anything of a legacy, but he sold* all his furniture."

"What's that? He smashed all his furniture? Had he gone mad, then?"

"I tell you he sold everything, to get money."

"Oh! sold his furniture! Why don't you say what you mean—with your Zurich French!"

"You see how badly off he must have been," said Denise, "to sell everything he had!"

"That don't prove anything, my dear girl; in the first place, as he was leaving Paris, he didn't need any furniture; and then there are people who prefer to live in furnished lodgings. For my part, I've sold my furniture four or five times, and yet I stay in Paris; you see that every day.—But after all, in which direction has the fellow gone? Didn't he tell you, monsieur le concierge?"

"Yes; he's gone round the world."

*Schtrack is supposed to pronounce the word *vendu*—sold—like *fendu*—split or broken;— hence the misunderstanding.

"The deuce! that's a definite address! Think of writing: 'To Monsieur So-and-So, going round the world!'—And he's taken Bertrand with him, has he?"

"Yes, I'm fery sorry for it, because Pertrand was just beginning to work fery gut."

"Bertrand, work? at what, pray?"

"At making preeches, bantaloons; it was me who taught him."

"My dear man, I think you must be dreaming now. Bertrand, the old soldier, Auguste's faithful servant, make breeches?"

"Like a horse."

"You're crazy!"

"No, no, I ain't; Pertrand, he did work. He passed every night working, and my wife told me he did it to help his master, who was throwing away all his money."

Virginie was speechless, but Denise exclaimed:

"I understand only too well. Dear old Bertrand! I knew he was a fine fellow! He worked to help Auguste, who didn't know anything about it, probably."

"Oh, no! he was going to sew up my tongue if I said a word."

"Well, madame, if Monsieur Auguste hadn't been without means, would Bertrand have worked at tailoring—worked all night?"

"Faith, my dear girl, I don't understand it at all. The last time I saw Auguste he treated me to punch, and yet he must have moved up to the fifth floor even then. To be sure, he had such a kind heart, he was so generous!—Well, well! there she is crying again! My dear Denise, you'll make your eyes as red as a rabbit's; and that won't bring Auguste back. Poor child! how she loves him! Those ne'er-do-wells must have some kind of magic power, to inspire such passions. Don't get

excited, Denise—he'll come back, he hasn't gone away forever. You'll see him again, I'm sure of it; and when he knows how much you love him, I propose that he shall love you and cherish you; I'll tell him what grief and torture he has caused you; I'll tell him how good, how gentle and sweet you are. Come, don't cry any more. Kiss me, Denise; Auguste will love you, for you well deserve it."

Virginie was deeply moved; Denise's suffering had melted her; for the first time in a very long while, genuine tears fell from her eyes as she threw her arms about the village girl.

Nothing pacifies the wretched so quickly as to find that someone else shares their distress. Denise listened to Virginie's entreaties; she exerted herself to summon her courage; she wiped her eyes, rose, and said with a long-drawn sigh:

"I'll go back to the village then."

"Yes, my dear girl, that's the wisest thing you can do."

"But suppose he should come back, madame?"

"Well, I'll let you know, I'll come and tell you; I promise to do my utmost to learn something about him."

"Ah! how good you are, madame!"

"Why, no—the trouble is that you're a slip of a girl who ought to be kept under glass."

"Monsieur le concierge," said Denise, "if you hear anything about Monsieur Auguste, don't forget to ask where he is, and find out where a person can write to him."

"Ja, mamzelle."

"Don't you be afraid, little Denise: I'll come often and ask Dutchy if he knows anything. He's a good fellow, though he does smoke all the time, is Monsieur—What's your name?"

"Schtrack."

"Schtrack! Oh! what a name! Schtrack! I believe that that means blackguardism in German. Never mind—au revoir, Monsieur Schtrack. Come, my love, I'll walk to the diligence office with you."

Denise left Auguste's late abode, and, with her arm through Virginie's, returned to the diligence office, carrying the bag of money which she had no choice but to take back to the village. Virginie offered to take the trip with her, but the girl declined her offer with thanks, and, after urging her to try to find out something concerning the man whom she had hoped to find in Paris, she entered the stage and rode sadly back to Montfermeil, saying to herself:

"Alas! I am not lucky in my trips to Paris."

XXI

THE TRAVELLERS' FIRST ADVENTURE

Auguste and Bertrand had taken the Lyon diligence. The young man was inside, and his companion on the box,—in order to enjoy the fresh air, so he told Auguste, but in reality as an economical measure.

It was the first time that Auguste had ever found himself in a public conveyance; accustomed as he was to drive in a light cabriolet, drawn by spirited horses, and to follow naught save his own desires and stop wherever he chose, it was not without a feeling of disgust that he found himself compelled to travel with people whom he did not know, to be pushed by this one, elbowed by

that one, and forced to listen to conversations which had no interest for him.

At his left was a stout party of some fifty years, with a cotton cap on his head, surmounted by a red handkerchief, and over it all a helmet-shaped cap trimmed with fur, with vizors before and behind. At his right was an old woman, whose face luckily was concealed beneath a shabby black satin bonnet, over which was thrown a green veil that no one was tempted to raise.

The vehicle had barely started when the man on Auguste's left began to perform like neighbor Mauflard, and the lady on the right followed his example. But in his sleep the stout gentleman dug his elbow into Auguste's ribs, and the old lady dropped her head on his shoulder. Finding his hands full with repelling the elbow of the one and avoiding the other's head, he said to himself: "It's great fun to travel by diligence! Oh! my pretty cabriolet, which Bébelle drew so swiftly through the dust, where art thou? Alas! if I had been more prudent, I should still possess thee; for if I had not begun to anticipate my income, I should not have encroached on my capital; if I had not done that, I should not have dreamed of disturbing my funds, which were safely invested; and I should have found that twenty thousand francs absolutely assured was better than thirty thousand due solely to speculation.—Pray remove your head, madame, if you please.—In that case, I shouldn't have put my property in the hands of that knave of a Destival, who consequently would not have run away with it; and then I should still be as rich as ever. I should have been able to do good with my money; and I would have gone to Montfermeil again and kept my promise to that pretty boy; I would not have made love to Denise, as she loves some man in the village who is

probably married to her before now ; but I would have seen her married, and would have reminded her in jest of that fall from her donkey in the woods ; perhaps—Oh ! for heaven's sake, monsieur, keep your arms still—you are breaking my ribs ! ”

Auguste's opposite neighbors were two gentlemen and a lady. The latter, who sat between the two men, was directly opposite Auguste ; but as she wore a very large hood, and as she kept her head lowered, he could not see her face.

“ Probably she isn't pretty,” said our traveller to himself, “ or she would have raised her head before this.”

The lady's dress was very simple—a travelling costume. The two men beside her were travelling salesmen, one in wines, the other in linens ; they had begun a conversation which seemed likely not to end before they reached Lyon.

Auguste was dazed by their constant chattering about casks, *veltes*, *jouys*, Rouen silks, good years and failures ; and, disgusted by the proximity of the sleepers, he was regretting that he was not with Bertrand, and longing for the first halt, when the lady in the hood moved her foot and touched Auguste's. A “ pardon, monsieur ” was instantly pronounced in a very pleasant voice. This incident roused Auguste from his despondency, inspiring the wish to see the face of his vis-à-vis ; and as his legs were in close proximity to hers, he moved them slightly and said a few words as to the lack of space in diligences ;—an excuse for beginning a conversation. The lady replied with a “ Yes, monsieur,” but did not raise her head ; whereupon our young man's curiosity became all the keener. She did not seem disposed to talk, but she did move her knees, which touched those of her vis-à-vis. Auguste was conscious of a desire to press one of those

knees between his own, but was deterred by this thought: "Suppose she should prove to be ugly! How I should regret having made her acquaintance!"

Notwithstanding, the young man ventured to press one knee gently; she did not withdraw it, but she did not raise her head; and Auguste, secretly enjoying the knee-play, said to himself: "Perhaps it's as well that I can't see her features, for I can at all events imagine that she is charming, adorable. With that idea in my mind, the mere rustling of her dress causes me a pleasant sensation, and it helps me to forget the tedium of the journey. Ah! madame, if you are ugly, do not look up, I pray, for you would thereby put an end to a too delicious illusion."

As they descended a hill, a violent jolt nearly overturned the diligence. The stout man and the old lady woke with a jump. At the same moment the hooded lady uttered a shriek of alarm and raised her head. Auguste saw a pretty face of twenty to twenty-five years, fresh and blooming, regular features, expressive eyes—in short, a charming ensemble which delighted him and caused him to press more tenderly the knee that was between his.

But she had already dropped her head again. The scare was at an end, the commercial travellers resumed their conversation, Auguste's neighbors closed their eyes once more, and he, enraptured by what he had seen, moved constantly nearer to his vis-à-vis, who allowed him to place his feet on hers.

"She is lovely," thought Auguste, "but her actions are very strange. If she allows me to press her knees like this, it must be that she likes it, or that she doesn't dare to take offence. In the first case, she is a woman who is not inclined to avoid adventures; in the second case, she is an innocent young thing, who has never

travelled by diligence before. I will satisfy myself that the second conjecture is the true one; we should always look at the best side."

The diligence stopped at Corbeil. The two salesmen hastily left the vehicle; the stout man extricated himself from his corner with difficulty; the old woman of the green veil dropped into the arms of the man who held the door open, and Auguste, having alighted, offered his hand to the young lady in the hood. But she replied with a faint sigh:

"Thanks, monsieur, I am not going to get out."

"She isn't going to get out!" repeated Auguste to himself, as he stood by the door. "Poor thing! she isn't coming to the inn to dine, which ordinarily indicates obligatory economy."

"Coming to dinner, lieutenant?" inquired Bertrand, who had climbed down from his seat on the box, and was awaiting Auguste at the inn door.

"Yes, yes, here I am."

"Have you left anything in the diligence?"

"No, but I would have liked——"

"Do you hear that? they say that the passengers must hurry."

Bertrand came forward to see what was keeping his master by the diligence; he spied the young lady and muttered:

"Morbleu! another! I might have known that there was a petticoat at the bottom of it! Remember, lieutenant—we left Paris in order to be good, to reform."

"You are right, my friend," said Auguste; and he turned regretfully away from the vehicle and followed Bertrand to the inn.

The travellers' dinner was soon at an end; urged on by the driver, they all returned to their places, the old

lady carrying her dessert. Auguste gazed with renewed interest at the young woman, who probably had dined on a modest loaf, and he placed his knees against hers once more with greater respect than before, because the idea of misfortunes puts thoughts of pleasure to silence.

The old woman requested Auguste to break some nuts which she had brought from the table, the stout man offered him snuff, the commercial travellers entered into conversation with him, everyone trying to become better acquainted with his fellow-passengers. The little lady in the hood alone held her peace. But darkness began to fall. Auguste longed for it; his neighbors dozed, the salesmen did likewise, and he moved his knees forward, trying by that means to establish an understanding with his vis-à-vis, and saying to himself:

“If she is unfortunate, I must try to comfort her. Moreover, I squeezed her knees this morning, and should I act as if I thought her less attractive just because she hasn’t the means to dine at inns? That would be worthy of Monsieur de la Thomassinière.”

As he did not wish to give his vis-à-vis such an opinion of him, the young man tenderly pressed the limb which she abandoned to him, and ventured to take a hand, which she did not withdraw. Night does not always bring gloomy thoughts, and Auguste looked forward to obtaining a kiss from the little lady, who seemed of so yielding a humor. But his two neighbors embarrassed him; at the slightest motion on his part toward leaning forward, the old lady and the stout man fell across his back, and he could not return to his place until he had thrust them back into their corners. The two salesmen, too, in their slumber, leaned against the young woman who separated them, and their heads frequently came in contact with her hood.

"Riding in a diligence is not all pleasure," said Auguste in an undertone.

"Oh, no! it isn't all pleasure, monsieur," replied the young woman.

But, in order to enjoy greater pleasure, the young man leaned forward again and bestowed a loving kiss on one of the salesmen, whose face was at that moment in front of the hood. The salesman woke, trying to guess the source of that mark of affection, and Auguste was amazed to find that the young woman's chin was less soft than her hand.

The salesman could see nobody save his neighbor who was likely to have kissed him while he slept; and although he was unaccustomed to inspire passions, he was convinced that he had kindled a flame in the heart of the young woman by his side. As he did not choose to be behindhand with her, the young man, who had hitherto had no thought for anything but his samples, and the duties imposed on his wares, began to think of something different, and to play with his hands on the young woman's knees. She made no resistance, while the two men, who seemed to be playing the *pied de bœuf*, seized each other's hand and pressed it with a vigor which surprised them both.

The first rays of dawn surprised the travellers in this situation. Auguste laughed heartily, the salesman testily withdrew his hand and the young woman her knee; but she glanced furtively at Auguste, and he promised himself compensation for the blunders of the night.

In the morning they arrived at Auxerre; again the young woman remained in the diligence. Toward evening they halted at Avallon, where they were to dine. The young woman alighted, but she did not enter the inn; having purchased a loaf of bread and some other things,

she sat down a short distance from the inn. Auguste, who had followed her with his eyes, allowed Bertrand to go in alone, saying that he was not hungry as yet, and joined his fair fellow-traveller, with whom he entered into conversation.

"Are you leaving Paris, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur"—with a sigh.

"Have you lived there long?"

"I was born there, monsieur."

"And you are turning your back on your native place?"

"I have no choice, monsieur"—with another sigh.

"Are you going to live in Lyon, madame?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"Ah! you have no settled plan?"

"I am so unfortunate, monsieur!"

"You arouse my profound interest, madame; but we can talk more comfortably elsewhere than on this road. If you will take my arm, madame, we might take a walk about the place until it is time to start."

"With pleasure, monsieur."

The lady took Auguste's arm, and they walked away from the inn, talking.

"If I were not afraid of being too inquisitive, madame, I would ask what makes you leave Paris."

"Oh! I am very willing to tell you, monsieur. I am the child of respectable tradespeople; they married me when very young to a man whom I did not love; but I felt bound to obey, in order to gratify my parents."

"That was very good of you, madame."

"There was a very agreeable gentleman who had courted me before I was married; I didn't love him either, but I listened to him to gratify him."

"I understand, madame."

"My husband didn't make me happy; he was never willing that I should go out, and I stayed at home because that gratified him. But sometimes I had visitors, among others the gentleman who used to court me."

"And that didn't gratify your husband?"

"Apparently not, monsieur; for not long ago, happening to find him with me, he turned me out of doors. I undertook to be angry, and he beat me, monsieur; and said he'd do it again whenever he chose."

"He is a man who has a most brutal way of procuring himself pleasure."

"As I didn't care to be beaten again, I left my husband, and started for Lyon, having barely enough to pay for my passage."

"I suppose then, madame, that you have friends in Lyon?"

"Oh! it was that gentleman who used to come to see me—he said that he was going there. However, I am no more anxious to go to Lyon than anywhere else. I wanted to get away from my husband, who made me so unhappy."

Meanwhile the fellow-travellers had reached a small restaurant. Auguste, remembering that his companion had not dined, proposed that they should go in and regale themselves, and she assented—to gratify him.

They entered the restaurant. Auguste asked for a private room, because one does not need witnesses to console a young wife whose husband has beaten her. He ordered as toothsome a repast as the place could afford, because he forgot as usual that he was no longer rich, and readily fell into his former habits. The Avallon restaurateur was put to his mettle to provide a dainty refection for the strangers who had honored his establishment. The dinner was served; Auguste urged the young

woman to partake, and she, although she said that she complied only to gratify him, ate everything and did not need to be urged to drink freely of a native wine which the host declared to be of the vintage of the year of the comet.

Dining together, they became more and more friendly. At first Auguste seated himself opposite the young lady; but he reflected that they were much nearer than that in the diligence, and that it was, to say the least, unusual for two persons to keep at a respectful distance, tête-à-tête in a private dining-room, when they have pressed each other's knees before witnesses. So he took his seat beside the young lady, who sighed from time to time, but did not repulse the young man, who seemed most anxious to console her. He tenderly squeezed a very soft hand, expressing great surprise that a husband could be so brutal as to hurt such a charming woman.

"Men are cruel," said the young woman, who continued to keep her eyes on the floor.

"They are tyrants," rejoined Auguste, pressing her plump hand to his lips.

"They cause all our misery!" added the young woman, as she allowed her companion to kiss her.

"Ah! they cause something very different!" cried Auguste, throwing his arms about her.

"They do! they do!" whispered the young woman, apparently no longer conscious what they do or what she did; but after several meagre repasts, it was no wonder that the wine of the comet year caused her to lose her head.

On recovering his wits, Auguste said:

"By the way—the diligence?"

"Oh! that's so—the diligence!" echoed the young woman, heaving a sigh, presumably from habit.

"I am inclined to think, my dear love, that it is high time to return to it."

"Very well! let us return, my friend."

As you see, the wine of the comet had established most friendly relations between the travellers. But as a general rule, affairs that are negotiated in diligences are speedily consummated.

Auguste summoned the keeper of the restaurant and paid for the dinner. The young lady replaced her hood, which was no longer on her head, I know not why. Then they left the private room and walked back, arm-in-arm, toward the inn where they had left the diligence.

As they walked Auguste talked with his companion, who seemed to him to have a very sweet disposition, but whose wit did not respond to the idea suggested by her decidedly expressive countenance. There are women whose wit is all in their eyes, and with them one must content oneself with pantomime.

As they approached the inn Auguste espied Bertrand, striding back and forth in front of the establishment, looking to right and left with gestures of impatience, and swearing energetically from time to time. When he caught sight of Auguste, he ran to meet him and made a horrible wry face at the young woman who was hanging on his master's arm.

"Here you are at last, monsieur! Sacrebleu! I thought that you'd left me here to chase the swallows!"

"Don't get excited, Bertrand, I am here. I am not lost, you see. Well, when do we start?"

"Start! start for where, monsieur?"

"Why, for Lyon, of course!"

"And is that why you let the diligence go—that you made me wait and call you and look everywhere for you?"

"What's that? the diligence has gone?"

"Morbleu, yes! more than an hour ago; but the time evidently didn't seem long to you!"

"The diligence has gone!" repeated Auguste, dropping his companion's arm; but she, evidently setting great store by its support, instantly took it again, saying:

"That's very amusing! isn't it, my dear friend?"

"It no longer seems so amusing to me," said Auguste; while Bertrand walked away, and muttered with an oath, stamping the ground:

"Her dear friend! Ten thousand bayonets! this is a very pretty mess!"

"But couldn't they have waited a little while for us, Bertrand?" asked Auguste.

"They waited two minutes, monsieur, and that's a long time for a diligence."

"And you didn't go?"

"Do you suppose that I would go without you? Ain't I attached to you, and to nobody else? What's the sense of my being at Lyon if you ain't there?"

"You did well, Bertrand. And our valises?"

"Oh! they're here. As I had a shrewd idea that there was something new, I wouldn't let them go without us."

"Bless my soul, my friend, we must make the best of this accident. After all, it matters not whether we go to Lyon or somewhere else; and whether we arrive there to-morrow or a week hence."

"Mon Dieu! my dear friend, it's a matter of indifference to me too," said the young woman.

Bertrand frowned and motioned to his master that he wanted to speak to him in private. Auguste succeeded in making the young woman understand that she must let go his arm for a moment, and he joined the ex-corporal, who said to him with a stern expression:

"I beg pardon, lieutenant, but who is this woman who sticks to your arm as if you had glue on your sleeve?"

"She's a young woman who was with us in the diligence."

"And why didn't she stay there?"

"Because I took her to walk with me."

"Who is the woman?"

"A very entertaining person."

"She didn't tell you what she is doing, did she?"

"To be sure: she's going to Lyon, in order not to stay in Paris."

"The deuce! if that's her only motive, I can understand that she doesn't care whether she goes there or somewhere else. But why is she leaving Paris? A young woman don't travel alone like this, just for the pleasure of travelling."

"Oh! she had a very urgent reason—her husband beat her."

"Perhaps he was justified, monsieur."

"Oh! Bertrand!"

"Why does she call you her dear friend so soon?"

"Because—because——"

"Oh, yes! because—I understand perfectly. But after all, monsieur, what do you expect to do with this woman?"

"I don't quite know; but you must see that I can't desert her here after being the cause of her losing the diligence."

"I should say rather that she made you lose it by telling you fairy tales, and arousing your pity by adventures that never happened, I'll wager. Besides, monsieur, a woman who takes up with the first man that comes along can't be anything but an adventuress. I'll bet that you don't even know her name?"

"Faith, no. But what does the name matter? Can't a person assume any name at pleasure? Whether this young woman has told me the truth or not, I won't leave her penniless far from the place to which she is going."

"Oho! she hasn't any money, eh?"

"Why, she had nothing for dinner but bread."

"This is a very excellent find that you've made! So, monsieur, when you left Paris, in order to be prudent and economize, here you are with a woman on your hands barely sixty leagues from Paris!"

"Bah! what can you expect? Is it my fault? Come, Bertrand, don't scold; hereafter I'll reflect a little more; meanwhile let us abandon ourselves to our destiny."

Auguste returned to the young woman and Bertrand followed him, saying to himself:

"I am very much afraid he's incorrigible."

The young woman promptly resumed possession of Auguste's arm.

"My dear friend," he said to her, "as the diligence has gone off without us, we need not hurry now."

"Oh, not at all."

"We can even pass a day or two here."

"I should like to if it would gratify you."

"Then we will consider how we will continue our journey—whether by some chance conveyance, by stage—or even on foot, so that we can admire the country in case it is worthy of admiration."

"Whatever will gratify you, my friend."

"You see, Bertrand," said Auguste in an undertone, "this little woman is good-nature itself, she seeks only to gratify me."

"She doesn't gratify me in the very least, monsieur."

"Because you don't choose to be gratified.—By the way, as we are to stay here," continued Auguste, "we

will take rooms at this inn. Bertrand, see that rooms are prepared for us."

"Yes, monsieur;—and for madame, too?"

"That goes without saying.—By the way, as we are under the necessity of economizing, one room will be enough for madame and myself. Isn't that so, my dear love?"

"Mon Dieu! yes, if that will gratify you."

"By the way, my dear love, you haven't yet told me your name."

"My name is Adèle—or Madame Florimont, as you please."

"Rather as you please."

"Call me Adèle—I shall like that."

"Adèle it is."

"Madame Florimont!" muttered Bertrand with a shrug; "that's a stage name—she got that in the wings of some theatre."

"My name is Auguste, my dear Adèle; for it is right that you should know who I am."

"Oh! mon Dieu! it's all one to me!"

"I see that you think more of the person than of the title, and that you judge people by their faces; if that method never deceives you, I congratulate you. But it is still light and the weather is fine; the best thing for us to do before supper, I think, is to take a walk. Will you come with us, Bertrand?"

"No, lieutenant, I have no desire to walk."

Auguste walked away with the emotional Adèle. They traversed the pretty little town of Avallon in every direction. Auguste commented upon what he saw and the young woman invariably agreed with him; so that he finally decided that a woman who can only assent to everything that is said without making any observations

on her own account, is rather monotonous company. But Madame Florimont had very pretty eyes, and it was not long since she had first fixed them upon Auguste; so that, when he had discoursed for some time without obtaining anything but insignificant replies, he played with Adèle with his eyes, whereupon she said in pantomime the sweetest things imaginable.

Only in front of the shops did the young woman make any remarks of her own motion. She stopped to gaze at a shawl and heaved a profound sigh.

"Would you like it?" Auguste asked.

"Oh! it would give me great pleasure."

"Very well, let's buy it."

Giving way to his former habit, the young man bought the shawl for Madame Florimont, who at once threw it over her shoulders, having rolled up the little neckerchief which she wore about her neck, and placed it under her arm. A little farther on she stopped and sighed again as she eyed a pretty cap. At Auguste's instance she tried it on; and as it was wonderfully becoming under the great hood, the cap was purchased. Next, it was in front of a jeweller's establishment that the young woman stopped and sighed: she wanted a little ring which would remind her of the day she met Auguste! He considered that desire too flattering not to be satisfied. But after that he took his companion back to the inn, not allowing her to stop anywhere, lest she should sigh again.

The young woman was very pretty in the shawl and cap. But when Bertrand saw her in that guise, he took Auguste aside once more and said:

"Monsieur, she wasn't dressed like that this afternoon."

"You will certainly agree, Bertrand, that she looks much better to-night?"

"But, monsieur, what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking about supper, for I am very hungry;—and you, my dear friend?"

"I too shall be glad to have supper."

Bertrand said nothing more; but he went into a corner and beat his head against the wall. In due time the supper was brought; Auguste went to the table with Adèle, and urged Bertrand to sit with them, explaining to the young woman that he was his factotum, his cashier, and not his servant.

Bertrand made a wry face at the word cashier; but he decided at last to seat himself respectfully at the other end of the table. To put him in good humor, Auguste ordered several bottles of good wine. The ruse was successful. By dint of drinking, Bertrand recovered his spirits and no longer looked askance at the young woman.

But when, after supper, he saw Auguste retire with Madame Florimont to a room in which there was only one bed, he muttered:

"You will certainly be taken for the lady's husband, monsieur."

"Faith, Bertrand, it will look very much like it to-night."

"But afterward?"

"Oh! the most important thing to my mind at this moment, my friend, is to get to bed. Do the same. Good-night; to-morrow it will be light."

"Yes," said Bertrand, filling his glass once more, "to-morrow it will be light, and we shall still have this hussy on our hands! It would have been just as well to stay in Paris and let me make breeches with Schtrack."

And Bertrand fell asleep finishing the bottle.

XXII

BERTRAND'S STRATAGEM

A night's sleep suffices to banish the fumes of wine and to restore calmness to our minds; a night of love often suffices to banish many illusions and to restore calmness to our senses. After the night at the inn with Madame Florimont, both Auguste and Bertrand reflected more coolly concerning their position: the latter had not for a moment failed to realize the fresh embarrassment in which Auguste had involved himself; and Auguste, who perhaps was already weary of playing pantomime with his young fellow-traveller, felt that he had made a fool of himself. But how was he to rid himself courteously of a lady who constantly said to him:

“I will go wherever you please, my friend.”

After breakfast, Auguste asked if they could obtain a conveyance to take them to Lyon. To travel by post would be too expensive for people who wished to be economical, although no one would ever have suspected Auguste of such a wish, as he always insisted upon being entertained *en grand seigneur*.

A leather dealer, who owned a large two-seated cabriolet, offered to take the travellers with him. To be sure, he would take four days for the trip, because his business compelled him to stop at several places; but they were in no hurry, so they made a bargain with the leather dealer, who packed our three travellers in his vehicle.

Auguste and the emotional Adèle took their places on the back seat, Bertrand beside the tradesman on the front seat, and they started, drawn by a single horse, large enough for two, but with no apparent disposition to take the bit in his teeth.

Bertrand chatted with the driver, a tall fellow of twenty-eight or thirty years, who passed a large part of his life on his wagon, was better acquainted with taverns than with his own house, where he spent less than three months of the year, and declared that not a maid servant within a radius of thirty leagues had been unkind to him.

Auguste looked at the landscape and tried to make Madame Florimont talk.

"What do you think of this view?"

"Why, it's very ugly."

"What? That wooded slope, the valley on the left, with the stream flowing through it, and yonder pretty village in the background—you call that ugly?"

"Oh, no! it's very pretty."

"Would you like to travel?"

"I don't know, my friend."

"Have you never been away from Paris?"

"Oh, yes! I've been to Saint-Cloud and Passy."

"Would you like to go to Italy?"

"If it would gratify you."

"But what about the gentleman who's expecting you at Lyon?"

"Oh! I don't know whether he's waiting for me!"

"I may be compelled by circumstances to leave you."

"Oh! but I won't leave you, my friend."

"But suppose I should return to Paris?"

"I would go there."

"But what about your husband, who beat you?"

"Oh! I wouldn't tell him that I had returned."

"I see that I shan't be able to get rid of this woman!" said Auguste to himself. "Infernal diligence! That great hood, those knees against mine, that night on the road—all those things go to one's head. You imagine that you have made a glorious conquest; you fancy yourself in love, and for twenty-four hours you are! But after that! Mon Dieu! what a mess I have got into!"

Bertrand, who had overheard a part of the conversation between Adèle and Auguste, leaned over to the latter and said in his ear:

"I beg pardon, lieutenant, but this woman seems to me as stupid as a pot."

"So she seems to me, Bertrand."

"Are we going round the world with a doll like that?"

"I'm afraid so, my friend. She has determined never to leave me."

"I promise you that I will make her change her mind."

Bertrand said no more. They drove for some time in silence. From time to time the leather dealer cast a furtive, lady-killer's glance at Madame Florimont, and said to Bertrand whenever they passed through a hamlet or village:

"I once knew a pretty woman here. I had an intrigue here. I set people's tongues to wagging here."

"It seems that you're a sad rake."

"Oh, yes! I'm well known in this region."

At nightfall they stopped at a small place where they were to pass the night. They alighted at a wretched inn; the leather dealer went out to attend to some business, and after supper Auguste, thinking that the most sensible course to pursue with the emotional Adèle was to go to bed, withdrew with her, leaving Bertrand with his pipe at a table.

The tradesman returned in due time and Bertrand invited him to drink; he was not the man to decline such an invitation. He was almost as accomplished a drinker as Schtrack; after the second bottle they became confidential and Bertrand said to his companion:

"You look to me like a good fellow."

"You're very kind!"

"You might do us a great favor, my lieutenant and me."

"If it won't cost me anything, I'm your man."

"It not only won't cost you anything, but I'll give you fifty crowns bonus."

"Say it quick, then!"

"Judging from all that you've told me, you're not a foe of the fair sex?"

"On the contrary, I am their dearest friend."

"What do you think of that young woman who's travelling with us?"

"Why——"

"Come, speak frankly."

"Faith, I think she's very fine! she's got a pair of eyes that she knows how to work mighty well!"

"So she takes your eye, does she?"

"To be sure, she would if she was free; but you understand I can't think of——"

"Well, listen to me; the very greatest service you could do us would be to rob us of that beauty."

"You're joking, aren't you?"

"No; this is how it is: my master is a reckless fellow; he is travelling to learn how to be prudent, and you can understand that the way to do that isn't to travel with a little woman who, as you say, works her eyes so well that she makes him long for her. But I must have common sense for him: now the best thing that I can see to

do is to separate him from this highway heroine, who, I am sure, pretends to be devoted to him only because she thinks he's rich."

"So she didn't come from Paris with you?"

"Oh, no! it was a fine chance encounter we had in the Lyon diligence. It would have done a hundred times better to upset us than to contain that princess! But you, who are always on the road—she won't be in your way in your wagon; besides, I fancied that I saw you looking her over like a connoisseur."

"I don't say no; but how do you expect——"

"You're a fine man, an attractive-looking fellow!"

"I certainly am not very ill-looking," said the tradesman, complacently viewing himself in a fragment of looking-glass on the chimney-piece.

"To-morrow, on the road," said Bertrand, "I will take pains to refer to the fact that we are hard up, while you, on the contrary, must jingle your coins. When we reach the place where we are to sleep, my lieutenant will pretend to be sick and say that he can't continue his journey. The next morning he will stay in bed; then you must seize the opportunity for a tête-à-tête, make your declaration, and propose to the young woman to take her off before we wake up. She'll accept—I'd bet my moustaches if I still had 'em."

"Agreed, my fine fellow—and the fifty crowns?"

"I'll pay them to you when I see you ready to start. You can go to Lyon; we won't go there, so as not to run into you."

"Shake; I'll abduct your charmer; and, as you say, she probably won't resist, because, although your companion's good-looking enough, he hasn't this figure, this build—in fact, this fascinating air; ain't that so?"

"I should say so! you remind me of a drum-major."

The bargain being made, Bertrand and the tradesman, after drinking a glass to the success of their scheme, went to bed.

The next day they resumed their journey. Auguste seemed more bored than ever by Madame Florimont's company; he dared not tell Bertrand so; but the ex-corporal observed the young man's ill-concealed yawns and stifled sighs while the emotional Adèle continued to tell him that it would be her delight to stay with him always. After some time Auguste gave way to the drowsiness that overpowered him. He fell asleep on the back seat of the vehicle, beside the young woman, who said not another word. Bertrand, pretending to think that she too was asleep, said to the driver in an undertone:

"Poor fellow! if only sleep might put an end to his anxieties and pay his debts!"

"Is he in debt, do you say?"

"That is why we left Paris; and I am very much afraid that we shall be pursued by creditors at Lyon."

"That's a pity! A business like mine is the thing! it always goes right on. Leather will never go out of fashion—it's like bread."

"It is precisely the same thing. So you are well off, are you?"

"Why, I am very comfortable."

Bertrand noticed that Madame Florimont raised her hood in order to see the tradesman better; whereupon he said nothing more, but looked off into the country so as not to interfere with his neighbor's ogling of the young woman, which she received with a smile, probably to gratify him.

They reached the place where they were to pass the night. Bertrand had not as yet mentioned his project to

Auguste, but chance seemed to favor him. On leaving the wagon, the young man was attacked by a violent sick-headache, and immediately upon entering the inn went to his room to lie down, telling Madame Florimont to order whatever she pleased.

Bertrand made an excuse for leaving the tradesman alone with their travelling companion; he went out to walk and did not return until very late. The tradesman was alone, admiring himself in a mirror.

"Well?" queried Bertrand.

"You can pay me the fifty crowns."

"Do you mean it?"

"It's all arranged: at daybreak to-morrow I abduct your charmer; she is to tell your companion that he can lie abed as we don't start till ten o'clock."

"Morableu! a victory wouldn't give me more pleasure! My poor master! I would like so much to see him become more reasonable! to see him get over his nonsense! I'll treat to a bottle—two bottles over and above the bargain."

"I accept."

"So she didn't make any very great resistance?"

"I should say not! I had taken her fancy; besides, she told me that her sense of delicacy wouldn't allow her to travel with a man who is in debt."

In his delight, Bertrand ordered several more corks drawn; he paid the tradesman his fifty crowns on the spot, and he did not go to bed, so that he might, unseen, witness Madame Florimont's departure. She rose at daybreak, without waking Auguste, and drove off with the leather dealer.

"A pleasant journey!" exclaimed Bertrand as he looked after the wagon. When it was out of sight he ran to Auguste's room and woke him, crying:

"Victory, lieutenant! I have driven the enemy from the citadel!"

"What's the matter?" inquired Auguste, rubbing his eyes.

"The matter is that I have relieved you of your emotional travelling-companion, who went off this morning with our leather man."

"Is it possible, Bertrand?"

"Why, yes, monsieur; she's gone, I tell you. You are not inclined to run after her, I trust?"

"God forbid!—So she has ceased to love me?"

"As if that adventuress ever loved you! She goes with the first comer who looks to be rich! And yet that's the woman, monsieur, that you had on your hands! You fall in love in a diligence, and *crac!* you scrape acquaintance, and—Look you, lieutenant, I'm no lady-killer myself, but it seems to me that a man ought to say these two things to himself in a public conveyance: 'If this woman is respectable, she won't listen to me; if she isn't, it isn't worth while to speak to her.'"

"You are right, a hundred times right! But this folly shall be my last."

"Do you know that counting everything—conveyance, presents and board bills—your intrigue has cost us at least five hundred francs? A pretty beginning for a man who is going to try to make a fortune!"

"Oh! you'll see, Bertrand, after this, that I'll be so good——"

"God grant it! But to avoid meeting that lady again, my advice is that we don't go to Lyon."

"Agreed; let's push on to Italy at once. Beneath the beautiful sky that saw the birth of Virgil and Tibullus, in the fatherland of all the arts—there will I, impelled by a noble emulation, turn my talents to account and try to

acquire additional ones. Perhaps fortune will smile on my efforts! Music, painting, offer resources which I must not blush to employ! We will spend very little and I will try to earn a great deal; for, in all lands, the higher prices one charges, the more merit is attributed to one. And then, when I have saved a neat little sum, we will return to France to enjoy the fruit of my labors."

"That's the talk, lieutenant; and, more fortunate than the great Turenne, who was killed on the battlefield, we will enjoy the blessings of peace after the war."

XXIII

THE WEDDING PARTY

The travellers allowed the leather dealer plenty of time, in order not to overtake Madame Florimont. The proprietor of a small *carriole* offered to drive them wherever they chose to go, representing himself as a public carrier, and assuring them that his vehicle was in condition to take them to Naples, which journey it had made at least fifteen times.

Although the *carriole* bore no resemblance to the *berline* of an ordinary carrier, our travellers made the best of it; but before entering, Bertrand satisfied himself that there were no women inside. A dress terrified him; he would not even have left his master alone with a nurse.

The vehicle contained no other passengers save an honest peasant of some fifty years, whom Bertrand scrutinized a long while, to make sure that he was not a

woman disguised, while Auguste took his seat, laughing at his companion's fears.

"Are you going to Italy too, my good man?" Auguste asked the peasant.

"Oh, nenni, monsieur," was the reply; "I ain't going so far as that; I'm only just going to my sister's, who lives a short three leagues out of Lyon; she's marrying her youngest son Eustache, my nephew."

"Oho! so you're going to a wedding? That's delightful! A wedding's great fun."

"Oh, yes, monsieur; for we be all great jokers to our place! and sly dogs!"

"One can see that by looking at you."

"And the way we drink—it's a regular benediction!"

"That's very good," said Bertrand; "so you have good wines, do you?"

"Oh, famous! My sister's got her own vineyard; she's one of the biggest farmers in the place; and see! when a woman marries off her son, why she makes the corks fly, you know. The wedding'll last at least a week. If you think you'd enjoy it, messieurs, you'd better come with me; you'll be made welcome, and you'll see some good fellows. My sister'll be glad to see you, and so will Cadet, for he likes folks from the city. You're Parisians, ain't you, messieurs?"

"As you say, Monsieur——"

"Rondin, at your service. Well! do you accept?"

Auguste looked at Bertrand; the idea of attending a village wedding was decidedly attractive to him, and the ex-corporal, for his part, felt a secret longing to make the acquaintance of Monsieur Cadet Eustache's wine; but the fear that his master would become too well acquainted with the ladies of the party led him to resist the longing, and he whispered to Auguste:

"Decline, lieutenant; that's the wisest thing to do, believe me; if we keep stopping on the road, our tour of the world will be simply a short trip to Bourgogne, which is not the land of your Virgils and Tibulluses; and we shall return to Paris without making a fortune."

"I am very sorry to decline your invitation, Monsieur Rondin," said Auguste, "but my companion reminds me that our business requires our presence in Italy as soon as possible. In truth, if we keep this conveyance, I don't think that we shall arrive there for a long time to come; I believe that the knave is driving at a walk; so that his miserable vehicle can make its sixteenth trip to Naples, no doubt.—I say, driver—are you asleep, my friend? Do you think it's a joke to drive like this?"

The driver turned and coolly informed his passengers that his horses were going at their ordinary pace, which they never varied, but that he would undertake to set them down without mishap at their destination.

"That is very pleasant," said Bertrand; "it means that we are to go all the way to Italy as if we were following a hearse; if the driver has made the trip fifteen times at this gait, he must have begun very young. And you, Monsieur Rondin, on your way to a wedding—aren't you in a hurry?"

"Oh! they'll wait for me. Besides, Cadet must have a chance to rest before he gets married."

"Has the groom been travelling too?"

"Yes, monsieur, he's just come from Paris—that's where he brought his bride from."

"Aha! so he went to Paris for a wife?"

"I'll tell you, messieurs: Cadet's a sly one, who'll never let anyone play it on him! The girls of his village, they're a lot of hussies, and so, to be sure of getting something good, he went to Paris to look for a wife."

"He must be a very clever rascal."

"Oh! he's the shrewdest lady-killer within six leagues; his mother she lets him do just as he wants to, so off he goes to Paris, where he had business anyway. After some time he writes home as how he's found the woman as suits him. Well, well! she must be virtue and innocence itself, you see! for Cadet knows what's what in the matter of women."

"And he found this treasure in Paris?"

"Not just in Paris, but in the outskirts. So, as he took his charmer's fancy, he brought her back with him, and he's going to marry her. That's why I'd like to have you come to the wedding, to tell me what you think of my nephew's choice."

Auguste would have liked to make the acquaintance of the bride whom Monsieur Cadet Eustache had found in the suburbs of Paris. He thought of Denise, and imagined that Monsieur Rondin's nephew had found some young village maiden as fresh and pretty and alluring as the little milkmaid. That thought made him sigh.

"Perhaps she too is married!" he said to himself; "for she was in love with someone; she told me as much when she said that she would never love me."

Auguste had ceased to smile since his memories had taken him back to Montfermeil. The peasant, surprised by his neighbor's melancholy, dared not suggest again his coming to the wedding, and Bertrand said under his breath:

"It would certainly be good fun to stay at table for a whole week; but there's always some pretty face at a wedding party, and I musn't expose my lieutenant to the risk of running off with another woman, for I shan't always have the good fortune to fall in with a leather merchant."

Nothing more was said, and the *carriole* crawled on. In four hours they made but one league. At the end of that time, Père Rondin, who was fond of talking, said to Auguste:

"If you're going to Italy on business, it's safe to say you won't get there in time. Be you an attorney?"

"No, I am a painter and a musician."

"A painter and a musician! Jarni! that's just what we want! you could play for our girls to dance, and paint a picture of the bride! That would be a nice surprise for Eustache!"

"Parbleu!" thought Auguste, "it would be funny enough if I should make the first trial of my talents on these good people!—What do you say, Bertrand? I rather like the idea of painting the bride's portrait."

"You see, Cadet wrote me as how she's a fine figure of a girl," said Père Rondin. "Be you good at catching resemblances?"

"Why, I haven't tried anything else as yet. However, I'll paint whatever you wish.—Come, Bertrand, this decides me. We'll go to the wedding."

"The wedding it is, monsieur. But for God's sake, don't do anything foolish, but remember your resolutions."

"Never fear, you will be satisfied with me."

Père Rondin was overjoyed that he had induced the travellers to attend the wedding; he was even on the point of inviting the driver too, when the vehicle, which was moving at a snail's pace, was overturned into a ditch, the only one by the road at that time, and the travellers rolled over one another. Luckily they got off with a few bruises, and the driver calmly busied himself with getting his horses on their feet, informing his passengers that he was sorry that he had not warned them, but that

ever since he had been driving over that road he rarely failed to be upset there, because his horses had fallen into that habit.

That accident put the finishing touch to the travellers' disgust with the wretched *carriole*.

"It ain't only a day's walk from here to our place," said Père Rondin; "let's foot it. We'll get there a blamed sight quicker if we walk."

The peasant's suggestion was accepted. They left the *carriole*. Bertrand took one valise, Auguste absolutely insisting on taking the other, and they started.

It was a lovely country. They were delighted that they were travelling on foot. Père Rondin was familiar with the roads. They halted only once for refreshment, and the next morning they arrived at Monsieur Cadet Eustache's farm.

They were not a hundred yards away when a tall youth rushed out and threw himself on Père Rondin's neck, crying:

"Here's uncle! come on, uncle! I'm only waiting for you to get married! and I tell you, I just long to be!"

"Good-day, Cadet. See, I've brought along a couple of good fellows, my boy; this gentleman who makes pictures and music, and Monsieur Bertrand, who drinks straight, I warn you."

Monsieur Cadet Eustache bowed low to the two travellers, then said to his uncle:

"Haven't you brought anybody else?"

"What do you mean by that, my boy?"

"Why, if you'd had some more too, it would have been all the better, because we mean to have some fun, you see! But never mind—they make two more, anyway."

"Haven't you got many people at your wedding?"

"Oh! there's eighty of us already."

"That's doing pretty well, seems to me."

"Oh! but we must have some fun! I want to have some fun! and it takes a lot for that; for my part, I never laugh unless there's at least a dozen in company."

"I told you my nephew was a joker," said Père Rondin to Auguste, who looked at Bertrand and smiled, while the latter muttered:

"This bridegroom impresses me as a big idiot."

"But take us into the house, Cadet; we're tired, and we want something to eat and drink."

"Oh! excuse me, uncle; you see, my wife that is to be is on my brain.—Ah! messieurs, you'll see, that's all I've got to say; you'll see such a fresh and blooming young woman! She's like a poppy! And a figure! oh! I tell you—round and plump everywhere!"

"Ah! you rascal! you seem to have found out about all this while you was bringing her home."

"Oh, uncle! I should never have thought of such a thing, because she's innocence itself, you see, and she'd have given me a good crack! and she's a strong one, my girl is. She's a good stout sample of virtue. However, she's my choice, and as you've got here, we'll have the wedding to-morrow."

During this dialogue they had arrived at the farmhouse, which was a substantial one and indicated that its owner was in comfortable circumstances.

"Jérôme," said Monsieur Cadet to one of his men, "go and let everybody in the neighborhood know that the wedding will be to-morrow, and that we're getting everything ready for the supper and the ball; and go and tell the musicians I've engaged.—I'll go and get my bride that is to be; she and mother are at one of the neighbors', but I want you to see her right away, and these gentlemen too."

"The fellow's terrible far gone," said Père Rondin as he escorted the travellers into the house and invited them to be seated.

Madame Eustache soon appeared; she kissed her brother, then proceeded to kiss the new arrivals; for that is the way acquaintances are made in the country.

"But where's the bride?" queried Père Rondin; "ain't we going to see her?"

"In just a minute, brother; she's gone to prink up a bit for the company. Ah! my eye! she's a fine girl, and Cadet knows what's what!"

"Has she got any money?"

"She's got a nice little pile that the gentleman she worked for gave her; and he told my boy he was giving him a real *rosière*! * And Cadet's a shrewd one, you know, and wouldn't let anybody take him in."

"Morableu!" whispered Bertrand to Auguste, "if the *rosière* corresponds with the bridegroom, I'll bet we're going to see some stout Pontoise cowherd."

At last they heard Cadet Eustache's voice introducing his chosen bride to the guests, and Auguste was not a little surprised to recognize Mademoiselle Tapotte, Monsieur de la Thomassinière's gardener.

Mademoiselle Tapotte had grown taller, and she was still very plump; she was, in truth, a fine figure of a girl, and, as formerly, she kept her eyes on the floor and bowed without looking at anybody.

"Superb!" cried Père Rondin; "bravo! you've made a great find, Cadet, on my word! And it's a fact that you can still see on her cheeks the down of chastity."

Monsieur Cadet received these compliments with a smile and said:

* *Rosière* is the name given to the maiden who is awarded the prize for virtue in a village competition.

"I have the honor to present Mademoiselle Suzanne Tapotte, who will be Madame Eustache to-morrow if God lets us live."

Everyone kissed the bride—that is also the custom—and Bertrand, who knew nothing of Auguste's adventure at Fleury, was reassured at sight of the maiden and flattered himself that she would not lead his master into any fresh folly.

But, when it came Auguste's turn to kiss Mademoiselle Suzanne Tapotte, that young woman, despite her ingenuousness, raised her eyes, and a little shriek escaped her when she recognized the young man.

"I am very awkward," said Auguste instantly, "to tread on your foot! I beg your pardon, fair fiancée!"

"Oh! was that what made her cry?" said Cadet, laughingly; "when anyone treads on the feet of our girls about here, they don't yell; they know what it means. They ain't like Suzanne! By the way, monsieur, uncle says you make portraits; do you make faces too?"

"What do you suppose that I make?"

"Why, I mean a head, with eyes and a nose, et cetera."

"I generally find nothing else to paint."

"Pardi, monsieur, if you had time to catch the likeness of my bride, just the face alone, I'd like it mighty well."

"I haven't anything but my pencils in my valise, but I can try to draw her."

"Draw her! Will that be just the same?"

"To be sure."

"Mademoiselle Suzanne Tapotte, monsieur is going to make your portrait; he's going to catch you."

The bride made some objection to allowing herself to be drawn; but Monsieur Cadet was obstinate about it, and she finally consented to lend her face to Auguste,

who asked for a room where he could work quietly and without being disturbed.

He was taken to a small room at the top of the house and furnished with all that he required. Monsieur Cadet brought his fiancée, who seated herself, with downcast eyes, beside the table at which Auguste was working. Monsieur Cadet was preparing to watch the process of catching his charmer's likeness when Auguste said to him:

"I am very sorry to send you away, but I cannot draw before anybody. If you want your wife's portrait, you must leave me alone with her; indeed, that is the custom; a painter doesn't like to have anyone see his work before it's finished."

"Oh, yes, that's right," said Cadet; "and then, if I watched you, I wouldn't have any surprise."

"That's so."

"All right, I'll go away. You needn't be afraid to stay alone with monsieur, Mamzelle Tapotte; he's an artist—he's going to catch you and surprise me. Ah! how nice that'll be!"

Mademoiselle Tapotte smiled without raising her eyes, and Monsieur Cadet left her alone with Auguste, while he went to oversee all the preparations for the wedding.

Bertrand was already at table with Père Rondin. They were soon joined by several farmers of the neighborhood. Neighbors, male and female, kindred and friends came to take up their quarters under Eustache's roof on the day before the wedding. Long tables were laid and covered with dishes and pitchers. They laughed and sang and shrieked and made a great uproar, for the hilarity of the peasant is exceedingly noisy. It seemed as if the wedding festivities had already begun; and Bertrand, who found the wine excellent and did not notice among the village

girls any faces likely to inflame his master, concluded that they might safely pass a week at the farm.

But everybody asked for the bride, and Monsieur Cadet said:

"Someone's catching her just at this minute, getting up a surprise for me, copying her face. I guess I'll go and see how it's coming on."

Monsieur Cadet went up to the room where he had left Auguste and Mademoiselle Tapotte. But the door was locked, doubtless so that they might not be disturbed. The groom tapped gently on the door, saying:

"It's me,—is it done?"

"No, not yet," Auguste replied.

"Is it coming on all right?"

"Yes, it's coming on well."

"What are you doing now?"

"An ear."

"Is it a good likeness?"

"It will be very striking."

Cadet went down to the company, exclaiming:

"I couldn't get in; he was just doing an ear, that's going to be striking. Oh! that painter seems to be a smart one! I tried to look through the key-hole, but he must have her posed in profile, for I thought I saw an eye instead of an ear. I'm going to put my wife's picture in our big room opposite the one of the boar my grandfather killed."

At last, after two hours, Auguste appeared, leading the bride that was to be, who would not have raised her eyes to look at a diamond, and who was even more ruddy than usual. Everyone exclaimed at her beauty, her bloom, and her innocent air, and Monsieur Cadet swelled with pride.

The groom asked to see the portrait and Auguste exhibited a face which was as like that of the queen of clubs

as one drop of water is like another. The guests all went into ecstasies over it, saying that the resemblance was striking, and furthermore that it had the advantage of resembling the groom and Père Rondin as well. Monsieur Cadet was overjoyed, and Auguste received compliments from the whole company.

The rest of the day passed in dancing and recreation; many guests did not leave the table except to go to bed, and Bertrand was among them.

The wedding day arrived at last. At daybreak the farm-house was astir. Monsieur Cadet donned a costume that he had had made in Paris: nut-brown coat, waistcoat and trousers. Mamma Eustache went to dress the bride. Mademoiselle Suzanne Tapotte was soon led in, armed with the virginal bouquet; whereupon they set out for the church, with the musicians at the head of the procession.

Bertrand enjoyed the festivities immensely; Auguste too, seemed not to be bored; he danced with the girls, while his companion kept the corks popping. The whole night was passed in games, feasting and carousing. But at midnight Monsieur Cadet led his wife away to the nuptial chamber, leaving the rest to drink and dance. Two hours later they were amazed by the apparition of the husband, in nightgown and nightcap, in the ball-room, crying:

“My friends, I am the happiest of men, that’s all I’ve got to say.”

And Monsieur Cadet returned to his spouse amid a shower of congratulations and jests from his friends, while Père Rondin said to Auguste:

“Didn’t I tell you my nephew was a sly one, and that it’s a sort of *rosière*, as you might say, that he’s brought from Paris?”

Auguste added his congratulations to those of the other guests. At daybreak, weary of dancing and eating, he went to bed, leaving the dauntless Bertrand to hold his own with three farmers, two of whom were all ready to slide under the table.

Auguste and his faithful companion passed the week of the wedding festivities at Monsieur Eustache's farm; and during that time the bride gave the young man several more sittings, for she always found something to change in her nose or her eye or her ear.

At the end of the week the travellers resumed their journey, not without an invitation from Monsieur Cadet to repeat their visit.

"*Beati pauperes spiritu!*" said Auguste as they left the farm. To which Bertrand replied:

"Yes, lieutenant. Here is one place at all events where you have behaved yourself."

XXIV

A SKETCH OF ITALY

Auguste and Bertrand arrived at Turin, undelayed by any fresh adventure. They took rooms at a modest hotel, for, before continuing their journey, Auguste desired to make the acquaintance of that pleasant Italian city, where one may fancy oneself in France, and where reigns an attractive mixture of French manners and Italian morals. The ladies of Turin are pretty, agreeable and piquant; in addition to the charm of our Frenchwomen they have more fire in their glance, a more sensuous intonation to

the voice, more abandon in their bearing. Bertrand, observing that his master gazed persistently at the Italian women, said to him again and again:

"Look out, lieutenant; we are travelling in search of fortune and not of conquests; we didn't come to Italy to admire black eyes and Greek noses."

"True, Bertrand; but as we find them here, there's no reason why we shouldn't admire them."

"Remember, monsieur, that the fine arts alone are to occupy your mind."

"The sight of a lovely woman kindles the flame of genius. Raphael was in love with his Madonna model."

"Perhaps that wasn't the best thing he did, lieutenant."

"Bertrand, you understand nothing about art."

"Perhaps not, but I know enough about it to calculate."

"I want to paint one of these charming heads that have caught my eye; I want to take for a model one of the piquant faces that I notice among the girls of this region."

"In that case you will do like Monsieur Raphael, you will fall in love with your model."

"So much the better, if it results in my producing a chef-d'œuvre."

"I'm afraid that it will result in your producing something else."

"Have you heard them sing, Bertrand?"

"Who, monsieur?"

"The young girls in the suburbs, the villagers, the simple working-girls; they all sing with such taste and harmony! I hear delightful concerts every evening when I am walking. We are in the land of music, my friend."

"I should prefer to be in the land of gold mines."

"Here the common people, the workmen, are born musicians; the petty tradeswoman seeks recreation after her

day's labor with her guitar. The boatman as well as the great nobleman, the peasant woman as well as the rich lady, blends her voice with the chords that she strikes on that instrument."

"It seems, then, that everybody plays it."

"And the Italian women have a nonchalant air when singing that forms such a striking contrast to the fire of their eyes."

"I certainly shall go back to Paris and make trousers, monsieur."

Auguste left Bertrand and went out to walk in the suburbs of the city. The season being farther advanced in that beautiful climate, there was already a wealth of verdure, shrubbery and fragrant groves, which the Italian regards with the indifference of habit, but which arouse the admiration of the stranger who sees for the first time that lovely sky, that delicious landscape, and those flowering orange trees which spread the sweetest of perfumes all about.

In a pleasant country everything is calculated to inspire pleasure. The climate of Italy seems to be the fitting climate of love. The aspect of a wild landscape, of a rugged and sterile country inclines the soul to melancholy and sadness; that of a verdant grove, of a valley studded with flowers, makes our hearts beat more gently and gives birth to no thoughts save of pleasure and of love.

Auguste, who did not need to be in Italy to have his imagination take fire, was conscious nevertheless of the soothing influence of the climate; he sighed as he glanced at the lovely women who passed him by; and as the young Frenchman was a comely youth, his sighs were answered by some very expressive glances.

Among the attractive young women whom he met in the street, Auguste noticed one, modestly but respectably

attired, who usually had an older woman on her arm. The young woman's face was fascinating; but her timid glances, far from challenging the young foreigner's, were modestly lowered when they met. Auguste followed them, however. Sometimes the older woman turned her head, and, when she saw the young man, urged her companion to quicken her pace. When they reached a distant suburb of the city, the ladies entered a small isolated house. The young woman afforded Auguste one more glimpse of her lovely features as she furtively glanced at him; but the old woman closed the door behind them and the enchanting image vanished.

Auguste stood some time in front of the house which the pretty Italian had entered; but at last, tired of staring at a door and windows that did not open, he returned to his hotel, saying to himself:

"She's an angel! she is ideally beautiful, the model of the Venus de Medici, of Girodet's Galatea, of Psyche, of Dido; and I must make the acquaintance of such charms."

The next day he went out to walk again, and again he saw the two ladies. Grown bolder, he approached them and, as a stranger, asked the older one for information concerning the first thing that his eyes fell upon. She answered courteously, and the young woman, without joining in the conversation, turned her beautiful eyes on the Frenchman from time to time. The old lady, who was very talkative, soon informed the young Frenchman that her name was Signora Falenza, and that her companion was her niece Cecilia; that they were far from rich, and for that reason lived in a retired quarter, and that they let a portion of their lodgings when they had applications from quiet and orderly people, because that enabled them to increase their slender income a little.

The old woman had not finished speaking when Auguste asked her to let the little apartment to him.

"I have come to Italy to study painting," he said, "and I have rather neglected it; I have nobody with me but an old soldier, and we are as orderly as young ladies. I flatter myself that you will have no cause to regret having us for tenants."

Signora Falenza made some objections; but Auguste was so urgent that she consented to show him the apartment. It consisted of two rooms, rather shabbily furnished; to be sure, the price asked was very moderate. Auguste expressed himself as delighted; he was satisfied with everything, and, after casting a passionate glance at the fair Cecilia, he hurried away to make his arrangements to return the same evening and take up his abode beneath the same roof with the two ladies.

"Pack our valises and pay our bill, Bertrand; we are going to move."

"Are we going to leave Turin, monsieur?"

"Oh, no, my friend; I am more pleased with it than ever!"

"In that case, why do we leave this hotel, where we are well accommodated, and at not too high a price?"

"For economy's sake, Bertrand; I have found much pleasanter lodgings, which will cost only half as much; I trust that you won't find fault with me this time."

Bertrand frowned and muttered:

"There's a petticoat under this, I'll wager."

However, he packed the valises, paid the bill, and followed his master, who led the way to the suburb.

"We don't seem to be moving into the fashionable quarter, monsieur," said Bertrand.

"What do we care, so long as the lodgings suit us?"

"True."

"See, there's the house."

"It's a long way from any other. Do you remember that we're in Italy, monsieur? It looks to me like a cut-throat sort of place."

"Do you mean that you're afraid, Bertrand?"

"Oh, lieutenant!"

"You are growing absurdly suspicious. This is a very pleasant house; the outlook is on fields and gardens. It's very quiet here, and that is what I like."

"Ah! you like quiet now, do you?"

"Very much."

Auguste knocked. The door was opened by Signora Falenza, at sight of whom Bertrand said to himself:

"If there's only faces like this one here, we shall certainly be very quiet."

The old woman escorted the strangers to their rooms, showing them every courtesy. As they passed through a passageway they met the fair Cecilia, who bowed pleasantly to the young Frenchman. Whereupon Bertrand heaved a sigh and thought:

"This is the economy the lieutenant mentioned!"

The travellers being installed in their apartment, Signora Falenza left them, saying:

"When you gentlemen wish for anything, you need only come to my room; my niece and I will hasten to offer our services."

"In that case," thought Auguste, "I hope that I shall frequently have occasion to seek them."

Bertrand inspected the two rooms, and at each object that he examined, frowned and muttered:

"This is very nice!"

"Isn't it, Bertrand?"

"Yes, indeed! a wretched bed and no pillows!"

"So much the better! we will go and ask for one."

"Two broken chairs!"

"So much the better! I'll go and change them."

"Closets that won't lock!"

"Bah! they're good enough for what we have to put in them."

"A desk that I can't find any key to!"

"I'll go and ask the ladies for it."

"Not a candlestick on the mantel!"

"The ladies will give us one."

"Not even a jar of water."

"Perhaps it isn't the custom in the country."

"Well! it's a very clean custom that don't allow a person to wash his hands! In fact, monsieur, we lack everything here."

"We shall lack nothing if we ask the ladies for it."

"The ladies! the ladies!"

"And the low rent, Bertrand—don't you take that into account?"

"If there wasn't anybody but the old landlady in the house, you wouldn't have been tempted to come here to live."

"That may be; but if I can enjoy the company of a pretty woman, and at the same time reduce my expenses, it seems to me, Bertrand, that you can't object to that."

Bertrand said no more; he went into a corner and filled his pipe, and as it was growing dark, Auguste went to his landladies' room to ask for a light. The old lady was absent, but her niece was there, and our Frenchman, overjoyed at the opportunity of a tête-à-tête with the fair Cecilia, sat down beside the young woman, who seemed less shy at home than on the street, and who replied with a smile to the soft avowals that he addressed to her. The conversation lasted until very late. Auguste forgot Bertrand, who was without a light; he was in a fair way

to forget a great many things, but Signora Falenza returned and by her presence revived his memory. He went up to his own room; Bertrand had thrown himself on the bed and was asleep. Auguste did not think it best to wake him, and he too fell asleep, his mind full of the fascinating Cecilia's image, convinced that he had never been more comfortably bedded.

Three days passed in the new lodgings. Auguste almost never went out; he watched for opportunities for a tête-à-tête with Cecilia; but the aunt was seldom absent and kept a much closer watch upon her niece. However, Auguste obtained a sweet avowal; he knew that he was beloved; but that was not enough, and Cecilia's eyes seemed to promise him more.

Bertrand had become accustomed to his new quarters; but he said to his master every day:

"You came to Italy to study and work, monsieur; instead of doing that, you pass all your time running after our young landlady."

"Cecilia is teaching me to speak Italian better, Bertrand; and I am teaching her French."

"I don't see what good this reciprocal teaching will do you."

"Why, the pleasure of it, Bertrand—is that to be counted nothing?"

"Are we travelling for pleasure?"

"Not entirely; but, when it offers itself, why not make the most of it?"

"Remember, monsieur, that your pleasures have always cost you dear."

"You can't say that I am squandering my money here; I have never been so quiet and orderly. I never go out; these ladies, when I invited them to go to the theatre, declined."

"I agree that they are stay-at-homes and don't try to make you take them all over the city. But I don't like that old Falenza with her reverences and her compliments."

"Really, Bertrand, you are getting to be too particular. When you travel, my friend, you must accustom yourself to the idea of finding different customs and different manners."

"True, monsieur; but I'm very much afraid that the foundation is the same everywhere! Selfish men, coquettish women, schemers who make a great show of wealth in order to make dupes more easily, rascals who open their mouths only to lie; and here and there a few honest people, who nevertheless consider their own interests before everything. I fancy that that's what we shall find in every country."

"Travelling makes you very eloquent, Bertrand. Write down your reflections; I'll read them—when we return to France."

"It will be high time, monsieur."

Auguste was no longer listening to his companion; he had overheard Cecilia's voice, and he went to her. But the young Italian had but a moment to speak to him, as her aunt would soon return. Yielding to the young man's urgent entreaties, she gave him an assignation for the next day. A pretty little wood, about a fourth of a league from the city, was the spot to which Cecilia was to go secretly. The time was agreed upon, and they parted, to avoid arousing her aunt's suspicions.

Auguste returned to his room with the inward satisfaction that one always feels at the approach of a long-desired moment. Never did evening seem longer to him, and he retired early so that the morrow would come the sooner.

Day broke at last. Auguste rose, dressed himself with care, and went out, leaving Bertrand still asleep. The place appointed for the meeting was a very long way from Signora Falenza's abode; but Auguste supposed that Cecilia had chosen it from prudential motives. He traversed a large part of the city, followed the bank of the Po, and at last reached the little wood, where he hoped soon to see his young landlady.

He waited patiently a long while; hope sustained him; it must be that some accident had kept Cecilia at home. But several hours passed and the fair Italian did not come. Auguste, weary of walking back and forth on the same spot, decided at last to return to the house, cursing the mischance that had prevented Cecilia from keeping her appointment.

As he approached the suburb where he lived, Auguste saw Bertrand in front of him, evidently returning home, like himself; he quickened his pace in order to overtake him. When the ex-corporal caught sight of his master, he uttered a cry of joy, saying:

"Morbleu! you are not wounded?"

"Why in the devil should I be wounded?" demanded Auguste.

"What would there be so surprising about it, monsieur, when you have been fighting a duel?"

"A duel—I?"

"At all events that's what our landlady told me this morning; she declared that a young man called for you at daybreak, and that from the few words that fell from you she gathered that there was a duel in the wind."

"Parbleu! this is very strange!"

"She even mentioned several places where she thought you might have gone to settle your dispute; so that, since early morning, I've been running in all directions,

and have been well laughed at by everybody that I asked if they'd seen two men fighting."

"I don't understand it at all, Bertrand."

"Do you mean to say that it isn't all true?"

"There isn't a word of truth in it."

"Ah! that old signora shall learn that I'm not to be made a fool of like this."

"Let's hurry, Bertrand."

"What's the matter, lieutenant? You seem anxious."

"Yes. I'm afraid that the niece has made a fool of me too. Here have I been waiting for her in vain three hours and more at the other end of the city."

"Ten thousand bullets! there's something very crooked in this long excursion they made us both take. Didn't I tell you, lieutenant, that the old woman made too many reverences?"

"Perhaps we are frightened without cause. But here we are. Knock, Bertrand."

Bertrand knocked, but no one opened the door. He knocked again until the window panes rattled, and there was no response.

"What does this mean, lieutenant?" he cried, looking at Auguste.

"Why, it means that there's no one here, that is very certain."

"Still, we must get in."

As he spoke, he broke in the door with a kick, and entered the house, followed by his master. It was deserted; they had carried off everything except a few wretched pieces of furniture, and the travellers' apartment too was dismantled.

"We are robbed, monsieur," said Bertrand.

"It looks to me very much like it, my friend."

"Did you leave our money here?"

"Alas! yes, in the desk. It was all there except these ten gold pieces that I have in my pocket."

"Ah! the rascals! To the devil with signoras, fine eyes and reverences! Why did we leave our hotel?"

"It was my fault, Bertrand, I realize it. It is my folly again that has caused this misfortune. But what's the use of talking? the harm is done."

"We must enter a complaint, monsieur; we must obtain justice."

"Enter a complaint, my friend, in a country where we are strangers, and when we have nothing with which to pay for obtaining justice, which is very dear everywhere?"

"In that case, monsieur, we must allow ourselves to be robbed and say nothing, must we?"

"That is the wisest course in this case, Bertrand."

"It's very amusing!"

"We must make haste, too, to leave this house, which was undoubtedly let to those sharpers, and of which we have smashed the door; for we may be asked by what right we are here, and be punished for breaking in as we did."

"That would be the last straw! Ah! my poor old Schtrack, it would have been much better to stay with you!"

"Courage, Bertrand, let us rise superior to disaster. We have nothing left—very good! that compels me to work. We will travel on foot; in that way one doesn't run the risk of making evil acquaintances as one does in a diligence. And then our baggage is lighter than ever, and each of us can say with the Greek philosopher: '*Omnia mecum porto.*'"

"That must mean that he hadn't a sou, doesn't it, lieutenant?"

"Pretty nearly that, Bertrand."

"In that case we are getting to be mighty philosophical!"

"Let's leave Turin and go elsewhere in search of prudence."

"Ah! where shall we stop, monsieur?"

XXV

WHICH COVERS A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS

Let us leave Auguste and Bertrand to pursue their travels, the one promising never again to allow himself to be led astray by the sly glances of the first pretty face he may meet; the other, swearing because his advice was not heeded, and reviling the sex which led his master into so many scrapes. You must forgive Bertrand, ladies, and pardon his ill humor; he really had some reason to distrust beauty. But if he had been twenty years younger, and some pretty creature had undertaken to make a conquest of him, who can say that, like his master, he would not have succumbed? Let us return to the village, to the little milkmaid, from whom Auguste's follies have kept us away too long; and may the picture of innocence and of true love give our eyes a little rest after that of the passions and intrigues of cities, and the hypocrisy and selfishness of society. It is like turning to a lovely landscape of Regnier after looking at one of Gudin's tempests; but, if the representation of the conflict causes us keen emotions, the sight of a pure sky and fields bright with blossoms brings sweet repose to our souls and often arouses pleasanter sensations within us.

Denise took back to her aunt the three thousand francs that she had intended to force upon Auguste; she heaved a profound sigh as she handed her the bag of money.

"Wouldn't he take it?" asked Mère Fourcy.

"Alas! it was too late, aunt! he had gone away! He's gone round the world! and God only knows when he will come back!"

"It ain't our fault, child; we got the money together just as quick as we possibly could; for, you see, three thousand francs ain't like a cheese. If he's gone travelling, it must be that he wasn't in need of money; at any rate we've nothing to blame ourselves for, and when he comes to see us again, he'll see what a pretty cottage we've had built for Coco."

Denise felt confident that Virginie would keep her promise, that she would succeed in finding out where Auguste had gone, and that she would send her news of him; that hope was the sole joy of her life. Hope always counts for much in the sum total of happiness that we mortals enjoy on earth; how many people have never known any other happiness than that which it gives!

Virginie had said to Denise, to console her:

"You will see Auguste again, and when he knows how dearly you love him, I am sure that he will care for you."

Those words were engraved on the girl's heart, and she said to herself every day:

"That lady will tell him that I love him, and when he comes here again I shall blush to meet him! I shan't dare to look him in the face! Perhaps he won't like it, but it's his own fault; why did he tell me that he loved me? Ought a man to say such things if he doesn't mean them? I made believe to laugh when I heard him, but in the bottom of my heart I realized how happy it made me!

Of course he only meant to joke with me; he talked to me as he does to all the women he thinks pretty. He doesn't know what misery he has caused me!"

On the site of the hovel occupied by the Calleux family, a pretty cottage had been built, consisting of a ground floor and attics only. Behind it was a garden of considerable size, surrounded by a fence. The cottage was constructed with the three thousand francs left by Dalville; it belonged to Coco, although he was still too young to live there. But Denise took pleasure in beautifying the little place for which the child was indebted to his benefactor; and there she passed a large part of every day, after performing her morning tasks, dreaming of him whose return she never ceased to expect. There, alone with the child, she talked to him about Auguste, taught him to love him, to remember that he owed everything to him, and never to enter the cottage without giving a thought to gratitude.

The garden was carefully tended. Denise planted flowers there. She remembered what she had seen in the lovely bourgeois gardens that she had visited, and she determined that the garden of the cottage should be laid out on the same plan. She desired that Auguste should be agreeably surprised when he visited the cottage, and should compliment her on her taste.

"He will see these shrubs," she thought, "these beds of verdure; and he will be surprised that peasants should have done it all as well as people from Paris."

But in another moment the girl would sigh and say to herself sadly:

"If he has gone to the end of the world, it will be a long time before he comes to see my garden."

The winter was succeeded by the lovely days of spring, and Denise heard nothing from Virginie.

"She hasn't found out anything about him," thought the girl; "otherwise she would have come to tell me about it."

The hope of hearing from Auguste induced Denise to make another trip to Paris. She easily obtained her aunt's permission, and one morning she appeared at Auguste's former abode.

As usual, Schtrack was smoking on a bench in front of his lodge. He recognized the girl, and although it was nearly four months since she had fainted in his arms, he called out when he saw her:

"Wasn't all the money in the bag?"

"What, monsieur? what bag? Has Monsieur Auguste come back?" inquired Denise, gazing anxiously at the old German.

"Oh, no! no! The young man is still travelling with Pertrand. But I thought you had come about the bag of money that fell in the yard, and that you didn't find it all. Sacretié! you see, Schtrack don't joke about questions of honor."

"Oh, monsieur! of course I didn't come about that! —Haven't you heard from him, monsieur?"

"From who, my child?"

"From Monsieur Auguste."

"How in the devil do you suppose I could hear from him when he's gone round the world?"

"And that lady—have you seen her?"

"A lady?"

"The one who was here with me the last time I came, and who was kind enough to help me."

"Oh ja! the demon! the hussy! the little grenadier!"

"Has she been here, monsieur?"

"Oh ja! she's been twice to ask for news of the young man."

"And she told you nothing about Monsieur Auguste?"

"Sacretié! don't I tell you that she came to ask about him? Don't you understand?"

"Do you know her address, monsieur?"

"The little hussy's?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"No, I don't know it."

Schtrack resumed his smoking, and as Denise could learn nothing from him, she turned away, regretting that she did not know Virginie's address. If she had, she would have gone to see her, not because she supposed her to be any better informed than herself concerning the whereabouts of the travellers, but because she could, at least, have talked with her about Auguste; and it is so great a delight to talk of the person we love, especially with someone who understands us!

Several more months passed without bringing any news of Auguste, nor had Virginie come to the village. Hope began to fade in Denise's heart, but love did not die out; that sentiment, when it is genuine, defies obstacles, time, and absence, and it alone does not pass away when everything about it passes away.

Denise was seventeen years of age. She had grown no taller, but her features seemed to have acquired a greater charm, her face more expression; the secret sentiment that engrossed her thoughts gave to her features a gentle melancholy which was most becoming to her sweet face. Village maidens rarely have that look; perhaps that is why the young men of Montfermeil and the neighborhood found in Denise a something that fascinated them and turned their heads. But she had very little to say to them, she no longer laughed and joked with them, she shunned their dances and their sports; and the other girls sneered at the little milkmaid, saying:

"How high and mighty she is! She puts on the airs of a great lady! She's trying to copy city folks. But with her scowling face she won't get any lovers."

Despite the prophecies of the peasants, Denise, involuntarily and unconsciously, made conquests every day; and the village maidens, with all their loud laughter, their merriment and the lusty blows they dealt out to the beaux of the neighborhood, saw that they all sighed for her who did nothing to attract them. And as Denise, in addition to her sweet face, was an excellent match, several young men applied to Mère Fourcy for her hand.

The excellent aunt had noticed that there had been something wrong with her niece for a long time; but she was convinced that marriage would rid her of that something which caused her to sigh night and day. Mère Fourcy flattered herself that she had had much experience, and remembered that a great many young women, after taking unto themselves husbands, recover the fresh color that is beginning to fade. So one fine morning she went to her niece, who was, as usual, alone in the garden of Coco's cottage.

"My child," said Mère Fourcy, sitting down beside her, "I have come here to talk to you about something."

"Whatever you please, aunt," replied the girl, with her eyes fixed on a marguerite from which she had just plucked the petals, and in which she had read that the young traveller loved her dearly.

"My child, you were seventeen years old on Saint-Pierre's day. A girl of seventeen ain't a child any longer—do you understand that, Denise?"

"Oh, yes, aunt!"

"Besides, you've known all about housekeeping for a long time, and your sewing's like a charm, and you make cheeses that a body could eat all day long without

hurting 'em; and then you know all the ins and outs of a house. You're active and a good worker; you have three times more wit than you need to guide a man who might try to go wrong; and morguene! the man who gets you won't ever regret it!"

Denise looked at Mère Fourcy in surprise, and faltered:
"I don't understand, aunt."

"That makes a difference, my dear; I'll cut it short. You're old enough to get married, and there's several chances offered. First of all, big Fanfan Jolivet, and then neighbor Mauflard's nephew, and tall Claude-Jean-Pierre-Nicolas Lathuille, who's just inherited his father's estate; there's lots more too that would like you, but those three are the best fixed. They're good boys and hard workers. It's your business to choose which one you want for a husband."

Denise had turned pale and shown great embarrassment during her aunt's speech; but she glanced again at the remains of her marguerite and replied in a very low tone:

"I don't want any one of them, aunt."

"What do you say, my child?"

"I say that—that I don't want to marry."

"You don't want to marry? Nonsense! You're joking when you say that! As if girls mustn't marry! I tell you, on the contrary, marriage will do you good. For a long time now you haven't been yourself, you don't laugh or sing any more. A husband, my child, makes you sing, brings back your spirits, and—Great heaven! you're crying, my poor Denise! Do you think I mean to make you feel bad? No, no! I'll send all your suitors to the devil first. My poor child crying! I don't want you to do that. Come, tell me right away what makes you cry."

"To have to refuse you, aunt."

"The idea of crying for that! Do you think I'll ever drive you to do what you don't want to do?"

"Oh, no! you're so kind to me, aunt!"

"But if you cry, I'll scold you. You don't want any of these husbands, so we won't say any more about it, my child. But, jarni! something's the matter with you, all the same. A girl don't sigh all day thinking about flies."

"Oh, aunt!"

"Tell me what the trouble is, my child."

"I don't dare to."

"I want you to dare to. You've got a pain in your heart, that's sure."

"Oh! I am very silly! I know that."

"You, silly! you, the cleverest, the smartest, the shrewdest girl in the world! Anyway, my dear, a body don't cry because she's silly. It can't be you're in love with anybody, are you?"

Denise heaved a profound sigh, and replied at last, lowering her eyes:

"Yes, aunt."

"Well, my dear, there's no law against it! and if it ain't one of the fellows that's offered himself, why, never mind, so long as he's an honest man and will make you happy; for he loves you dearly too, no doubt?"

"No, aunt, he doesn't love me at all; he doesn't give me a thought."

"Jarni! I'll go and tear his eyes out! Do you mean to say he's forgotten you, or deceived you? The idea of my Denise loving him, and him not being too happy to marry her!"

"But he has never spoken of marrying me, aunt."

"Then he's a deceiver, is he, a rake?"

"No, aunt; but he's—it's that gentleman from Paris."

"Monsieur Dalville?"

"Yes, aunt."

"O mon Dieu! what on earth are you thinking about, Denise? You're in love with a fine gentleman from Paris, a man in the best society, a man who would never look at a peasant girl!"

"Oh, yes! he did look at me a great deal, I assure you."

"But you can't think of such a thing as loving Monsieur Dalville, my dear!"

"Alas! it isn't my fault—I can't help it."

"How did this love come to you, my child?"

"When I fell from my donkey, aunt."

"Is it possible?"

"Mon Dieu! yes. I met Monsieur Auguste on the road; he was in his cabriolet and I was walking behind Jean le Blanc."

"You told me that, my child."

"He kept looking at me, and I pretended not to notice it. He got out of his carriage and followed me along the narrow path through the wood; he told me I was pretty and I laughed at his compliments."

"You told me that, too."

"He tried to kiss me, and in defending myself I scratched his face."

"You didn't tell me that, my dear."

"Oh! I was very angry then! I hated the man! I got on Jean le Blanc so as to get away from him faster, but Jean began to gallop and threw me off. I fell—I don't know how."

"Mon Dieu! my child! And then what?"

"The gentleman ran up to me; but he lifted me up so respectfully—he seemed so sorry for my fall—he was paler and trembled more than I did. Then, I don't know

how it happened, but all of a sudden my anger went away, and—and I believe that I loved him already.”

“And then?”

“Bless me! you know, aunt, that we found what he’d given Coco and his grandmother, and I felt that that made me love him still more. I saw him again at Madame Destival’s, and he told me to take care of Coco; and since then, you know, aunt, he hasn’t been to see us but once.”

“Have you told him that you loved him?”

“No; on the contrary, as Monsieur Bertrand told me that would keep him from coming to see us, I told him that I should never love him.”

“You did well, my child.”

“Oh, no, aunt! I think that I did wrong rather, for he hasn’t been here since then, and he went away without bidding us good-bye.”

“Well, well, now she’s crying again! But, my child, what good does this love do you?”

“None at all, aunt.”

“Monsieur Auguste wouldn’t have married a poor village girl. Now he’s gone away, and we shan’t ever see him again probably.”

“Do you mean to say that he may not come back? Won’t he want to see—Coco again? He will come back, aunt; ah! I am still hopeful.”

“Even if he should, remember that he’s a gentleman, and used to fine ladies; while you—Well! what are you looking at that flower so for?”

“It told me that Auguste loved me dearly.”

“Who told you so?”

“This marguerite, aunt.”

“Pluck another one to-morrow, my dear, and it will tell you just the opposite.”

"Oh! I pluck them every morning, aunt."

"And does the flower always tell you he loves you?"

"When there's one that doesn't I question another, and I keep on till I find one that gives me the answer I want."

"That's the way girls tell their own fortunes. But look you, my child, it would be much more sensible to forget a man who don't give you a thought."

"I can't do it, aunt."

"If you should take a husband instead of plucking marguerites, your love would soon pass away, I promise you."

"No, aunt, I don't want to marry. Leave me at liberty to think of him and to consult the flowers, and I promise you that I won't cry any more."

"As you please, my dear Denise; and if that's your taste, stay unmarried. But you're so pretty, and such a figure. Ah! it would be a great pity if you should pass your youth consulting flowers."

The worthy aunt said no more to Denise on the subject of marriage, and the suitors were dismissed. The villagers indulged in various conjectures concerning the girl's conduct. The young women laughed at the gallants who had been rejected; the gallants hoped that in time Denise would be less cruel. But time passed and Denise's determination did not waver.

Mère Fourcy became infirm and her niece waited upon her with the most loving solicitude. Coco, who as he grew up had learned to love his benefactresses as dearly as his goat, strove to make himself useful, and often diverted Denise from her melancholy by his childish prattle. She loved to watch and to fondle the child whom Auguste had loved; she had him taught all that could be taught him in the village; she guided his heart into

the paths of virtue, for she wished him to do credit to his benefactor.

Two years had passed since Auguste and Bertrand started on their travels. During that period Denise had been to Paris six times in quest of news of the travellers; but Schtrack had never been able to give her any, and she heard nothing from Virginie. At the end of two years Mère Fourcy fell sick, and, despite her niece's care, soon died in her arms.

The loss of her aunt caused Denise the keenest sorrow; we can but regret profoundly those who throughout their lives have sought only to make us happy, without ever reminding us of what they have done for us—the latter being a method of conferring favors which freezes gratitude; for there are many people who do good, but there are very few good people.

Denise was left alone on earth but for Coco, who was not yet eight. She let her house, which was now too large for her, and went to live in Coco's cottage, to which she added a small wing. There Denise was happier: it seemed to her that she was nearer Auguste. She was no longer obliged to be a milkmaid, and she hired an old peasant woman who undertook the house work. Denise busied herself about her garden and sought additional knowledge in books. In her aunt's lifetime she was rarely able to gratify her taste for reading, because Mère Fourcy considered that she already knew too much for a peasant. But nothing now prevented her from following her inclination and trying to train her mind.

One by one Denise laid aside the coarse woollen skirt, the apron, the sackcloth waist; she wore clothes which, while they were most simple and unpretending, approximated the costume of Parisian ladies. Thereupon the villagers said to one another:

"Denise Fourcy is trying to play the fine lady, that's sure. Don't you see that since her aunt died she don't dress like us any more, but puts on style and uses big words when she talks?"

Denise cared little what the people of the village thought; her only desire was to please him whom she still expected; and she would say to herself as she looked in her mirror:

"Perhaps he'll like me better like this. He won't find me so awkward and embarrassed as I was; but it will be all the same to him, for he doesn't love me, and he thinks that I don't love him either. *Mon Dieu!* why did I tell him that? It was Monsieur Bertrand that made me do it; he deceived me by telling me that Auguste wouldn't come to the village if I loved him. Yes, I am sure that he deceived me; for it was after that that Auguste received me so unkindly in Paris; and he didn't come here again. But when I see him, ah! then I'll tell him the truth; it is always wrong to lie. And I will beg him not to lie to me either."

Another year passed; Denise was twenty and Coco nine. The child was happy; mirth and health shone on his pretty face. Denise was still melancholy; she tried in vain to banish from her mind the memory of Auguste whom she was beginning to lose hope of seeing again.

"Perhaps he has settled in some foreign land!" she would say to herself; "perhaps he is married—and will never come back!"

Then her eyes would fill with tears, and the child's caresses served only to intensify her grief, for he was forever asking her:

"Shall I see my kind friend soon?"

Denise often determined to be sensible, to drive her insane passion from her heart, and to think no more of

Auguste. Then she would go out to seek distraction in the fields; but, whether by chance or from preference, she always found herself on the narrow path in the wood, where she fell from her donkey.

XXVI

THE RETURN

One lovely spring evening Denise sat under the shrubbery in the garden, reading, while Coco played in front of the cottage, beside the old peasant woman, who had fallen asleep on a bench.

Happening to look out on the road, Coco saw a man standing there, apparently gazing at the house, and so engrossed by his thoughts that he did not notice the child playing near by.

The man was not dressed like a peasant; a gray woolen jacket, trousers with gaiters, and a bundle slung over his shoulder, seemed to indicate a traveller. He wore a shabby round cap, and in his hand he carried a stick which he evidently needed to lean upon; for his face was pale and worn, and his long beard and the expression of his eyes denoted poverty and suffering.

Coco stole toward him, staring at the stranger with childish curiosity and was surprised to see tears falling from his eyes as he gazed at the cottage.

The child had learned from Denise to be compassionate to the sufferings of the unfortunate. He stood in front of the stranger and said in an artless and kindly tone:

"Are you unhappy, monsieur? If you'd like to rest in our house, come in and we'll give you some supper."

The child's voice startled the stranger, he started in surprise and scrutinized Coco closely; then he took his hand and squeezed it tenderly, saying in a voice choked by emotion:

"What! is it you, my friend?"

The boy, surprised to be addressed in that way, answered with a smile:

"Do you know me, monsieur?"

The wayfarer sighed, and replied after a moment:

"Yes, I saw you once, long ago, here, on this spot; but at that time, instead of this pretty cottage, there was only an old ruined hovel here! What a transformation has taken place!"

"Oh! it was my good friend who gave me the money for all this; for that's my house, monsieur, that is; but when he comes back, I'll thank him ever so much!"

The stranger pressed the child's hand again, as he continued:

"Won't you come in? Come, I'll tell Denise that you're going to have supper with us."

"Denise! what, is Denise here?" exclaimed the stranger, detaining the child.

"Yes, monsieur, we've lived together ever since her dear aunt died."

"And is Denise married?"

"No, monsieur.—Well, are you coming?"

After a moment's hesitation, the stranger decided to follow the child, who took his hand and led him into the house.

"Denise! Denise!" cried Coco, "here's some company! here's a gentleman, who's hungry!—You are hungry, ain't you?—Denise, come, I say!"

But Denise was at the end of the garden and did not hear the child's voice; so he ran to the thicket of shrubbery to fetch her, and the stranger slowly followed him.

"Dear Denise," said Coco, "I just saw a man on the road who looked very unhappy, and I asked him to come into the house; we'll give him some supper, won't we?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I did well to bring him in, for he looks as if he was poor; and yet he didn't beg."

"Yes, you did well; let's go to him."

"Look, he has followed me—there he is."

The stranger had stopped at a little distance and was looking at Denise; the last rays of daylight rested on his face, and the girl examined him with interest as she walked toward him. But she had not taken four steps when she gave a little cry and ran, flew toward the stranger.

"Auguste!—Monsieur—is it you?"

That was all she could say; and Auguste, for he it was, received her in his arms.

"Denise! dear Denise!" said Auguste, pressing to his heart the girl whom surprise and joy had almost deprived of consciousness.

At last she recovered the power of speech.

"Coco, it is your kind friend," she cried, "your benefactor has come back! Come and kiss him."

The child stared at Auguste in open-mouthed amazement; he had difficulty in reconciling himself to the idea that that shabbily dressed man with the long beard was his benefactor; but if his eyes did not recognize his kind friend, his heart was not silent: something drew him to the stranger, so that he ran joyfully to Auguste and kissed him, and the latter abandoned himself for

some moments to the pleasure of holding the child and the girl in his arms.

"So you knew me, did you, Denise?" he said at last.

"Oh! always! I shall always recognize you! Even if your face were not the same, my heart would tell me that it was you."

"Dear Denise!"

"Well, I didn't know you, my kind friend," said Coco, "because you've got a beard; and then, you were crying."

"Alas! you did not expect to see me in this pitiable costume, did you?"

"Oh! we expected you, dressed no matter how! In our eyes, aren't you always well dressed? But when I see you like this, I fear that you have been unfortunate; and that is what grieves me."

"Yes, Denise, yes, I have been unfortunate, but I have earned it! It's my own folly that has reduced me to this condition! But as I still have your friendship and this little fellow's, I feel that I have not lost all."

"Oh! monsieur, is it possible that you could doubt our hearts?"

"What would you have? misfortune often makes men unjust. I was wrong, I see. I will tell you everything that has happened to me, Denise; I will tell you frankly what I have done; you are the last one from whom I would conceal my shortcomings, for I am sure beforehand that you will forgive me."

"Oh! I am so glad to see you again, monsieur! But come in and sit down in the house, and rest; you must want something to eat and drink."

"It is true that I have had nothing since yesterday."

"Since yesterday!" cried Denise; and a deathly pallor overspread her cheeks, her eyes filled with tears, and

she could not speak; she laid her head on Auguste's shoulder and gave free vent to the tears that were choking her.

"Denise, dear Denise, pray be calm! I am with you; I have already forgotten part of my misfortunes—don't be alarmed about me! Besides, I am not entirely without resources. The reason why I have eaten nothing since yesterday is that sad thoughts took away my appetite. I still have a little money, but I am saving it to procure lodgings in Paris; for nothing is so conducive to economy as misfortune. Oh! the loss of my wealth is not what grieves me most, as you know; blest with a happy disposition, hope and cheerfulness continued to travel with me even when my purse was light; but the ingratitude of men, the desertion of him whom I loved like a brother—that is what cut me the deepest! that is what took away my courage! I know that a man may bear the blows of destiny philosophically; but I could find no philosophy to enable me to bear the loss of a friend, the pains of the heart."

"O mon Dieu!" said Denise; "is it possible! But, it is true, you are alone—What has become of Bertrand?"

"He has deserted me! He got tired of my follies, and he left the man who, in his prosperous days, treated him as a friend, not as a servant."

"Bertrand deserted you—left you when you were unfortunate and a long way from home! Oh, no! no! that is impossible, monsieur! He loved and honored you! Bertrand is an old soldier, he has not forgotten all that he owes you; I will answer for his heart as surely as for my own."

"Nevertheless, Denise, I have told you the truth. But let us go into the house; later I will tell you the story of my travels."

"Oh! forgive me, monsieur; to think of my forgetting! Let's go in quickly; come and rest."

Denise led Auguste into the house. Coco followed them, jumping and crying aloud for joy.

"Here's my kind friend come back! Denise won't be sad any more!"

The girl ran to wake her old servant, and turned everything topsy-turvy in her haste to set before the wayfarer the best that she had; and as she went to and fro by Auguste, she stopped constantly to look at him, as if to make sure that he was not a delusion, then exclaimed:

"He is here! he has come back at last! he hadn't forgotten us!"

And she wiped away a tear born of her emotion, which was instantly succeeded by a smile. Auguste was deeply moved by the pleasure that his arrival caused in the cottage. He did not tire of gazing at Denise, he noticed the change that had taken place in her language and manners and dress; and as he turned his eyes upon himself, he sighed and said:

"The three years that have passed have wrought vast changes: instead of the milkmaid, a rather awkward village girl, I find in you a young woman full of charm. And I, whom you used to see so dandified and elegant—here am I arrayed like any poor devil who travels on foot without the means to pay for a lodging!"

"What difference does that make? Are you Coco's benefactor any the less? or he who made love so ardently to the little milkmaid?"

"You will agree, Denise, that in this costume I don't look very much like a benefactor or a seducer."

"For my part, if you don't like me this way, I will very soon go back to the woolen waist and the little cap."

“You will always be lovely. However, I have no right—I must not forget——”

Auguste paused and Denise looked at him anxiously; but he seemed to make an effort to banish a painful memory and took his place at the table, saying:

“Let us not think of anything but the pleasure it affords me to be here! Denise, Coco, come beside me; one evening of happiness will help me to forget several months of suffering.”

They sat down at the table. Auguste was the object of the most zealous attentions on the part of the occupants of the cottage; the presence of a sovereign would not have made them so happy as that of the poor wayfarer.

When Auguste had recovered from the fatigue of his journeying, he took Coco on his knee, seated himself in front of Denise, and began his story:

“I determined to travel, hoping that travelling would ripen my wits; moreover, it was necessary that I should make an effort to put my talents to some use. I know how to paint, I am a good musician, but it was very hard for me to look for pupils in Paris, the scene of my days of splendor, where I could not take a step without meeting old acquaintances, who turned their heads to avoid bowing to me when they learned that I was ruined! So I started with Bertrand——”

“Yes, and without coming to bid me good-bye!” interjected Denise with a profound sigh.

“I was afraid to see you again. I supposed that you were married. I have not forgotten what you told me in your garden when I came to call on you.”

Denise blushed, and Auguste continued:

“So I started. We had six thousand francs left; with economy, that was enough to carry us a long way. But it is so hard for me not to do foolish things!”

"And to be good!" said Denise under her breath.

Auguste smiled and continued:

"At Turin we were robbed by adventuresses of our whole fortune except a few gold pieces, with which we travelled to Rome. There I worked and earned a little money with my violin, and Bertrand gave fencing lessons. We went to Naples, where I met by mere chance a lady whom I had known in Paris; she interested herself in my behalf and procured me some rich pupils. We had lived there very comfortably for a year when I received two or three stiletto thrusts on account of an Italian damsel's lovely eyes."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Denise; "why did you need to love an Italian too?"

"I was driven to seek distraction. That adventure disgusted me with Italy, where, in truth, I saw no prospect of making a handsome fortune. I determined to go to England, where moderate talent often commands a very high price. Bertrand was still ready to go with me; we left Italy and reached London without mishap. There, after a very short time, having acquired the friendship of a man who frequented the first society, he made me the fashion, and I had more pupils than I could give lessons to. I charged very high rates, and I was overjoyed to find that I should be able some day to return to my native land with a good round sum of money. But, alas! I had the ill luck to become acquainted with a young English-woman."

"Well! still another woman!" exclaimed Denise testily.

"She lived with some relations, who, so she said, made her very unhappy. She proposed to me to carry her off, and I dared not refuse. Despite Bertrand's advice I indulged in that escapade. But the abduction created an

uproar, and I was proceeded against; I was obliged either to marry the young woman, or to pay a large sum; for in England one must always give compensation. I did not choose to marry, so I paid."

"Ah! that was much better than—than to marry by force," said Denise.

"But that adventure caused me to lose my pupils and the fruit of my labors. Distressed by this catastrophe, for which I could accuse no one but myself, I proposed to Bertrand that we take a trip to Scotland before returning to our own country. One of my pupils had presented me with a horse, I bought one for Bertrand, and we left London in the saddle. We stopped at a lovely village called, I believe, Newington. After breakfasting at an inn, I sat alone, waiting for my companion, whom I had sent to pay our bill. Surprised at his failure to return, I went downstairs and made inquiries. 'Your companion has gone,' they told me; 'he just mounted his horse and rode off at a gallop.' Utterly unable to understand his absence, I remained at the inn all day, waiting for him. I could not imagine that Bertrand had left me; but the next day again I waited in vain. I questioned the people at the inn; they could tell me nothing except that, after paying our bill, he had crossed the courtyard, and a moment later they had seen him riding away at full speed. I was driven at last to a realization of the fact that Bertrand had voluntarily turned his back on me. Ah! Denise, I can't tell you how I suffered because of his desertion! Accustomed to living with my old friend, I had often paid little heed to his advice, but I set great store by his friendship. No doubt he was tired of my foolish performances; he probably lost patience, and despairing of making me less reckless, did not choose to share my evil fortune any longer. However, he had often

sworn never to leave me while he lived, and I trusted his oath, for a friend's is more sacred than a mistress's."

"Bertrand—leave you! I can't understand it!" said Denise.

"I changed my plans, and, having no further desire to go to Scotland, determined to return to France. Oh! how I longed to stand on my native soil! I felt a most intense craving to see you and to embrace this little fellow! I sold my horse to pay my passage. When I arrived at Calais, I reckoned up my resources and determined to travel on foot. But, I confess, my strength frequently betrayed my courage. Accustomed as I am to wealth, to the comforts of life, my health is still that of a dandy, while my modest costume stamps me a humble wayfarer; and more than once I had to stop on the way. At last I reached this village; before going on to Paris, I longed to see this spot once more, to learn what you were doing, Denise. And here I am by your side! Unhappiness, fatigue, everything is forgotten; and to-morrow, with a razor, clean linen, and a few changes in my costume, you will see once more, not the resplendent Dalville, but at least poor Auguste, for whom your friendship is not dead."

Auguste kissed the child. Denise, who had taken the deepest interest in his story, said to him:

"I trust that now you will not go travelling over the world any more?"

"You must stay with us, my kind friend," said Coco.

"Yes, I see that I must abandon the hope of making my fortune with such talents as I have. I have ceased to think of travelling. As to what I shall do—I haven't any clear idea as yet; but still, among my dear friends in Paris, who no longer deign to look at me, there are many whom I have obliged, and who are still my debtors.

There is something like twelve thousand francs owing to me, and I propose to try to collect at least half of it; then——”

“You will come and settle down near us, won’t you, monsieur?”

“At all events, Denise, I will come to see you often.”

“But you won’t go to Paris right away; you won’t leave us for a long while——”

“No, I promise.”

“Remember that you are in your own house here; we built this cottage with what you gave Coco, so you see that it belongs to you.”

“No, Denise, this house is the boy’s fortune; I am too happy to have been able to contribute to his welfare, and I only regret that I didn’t use in this way all the money I have wasted on my pleasures!—Nothing is left to me from my follies; but something always remains of the good that one does!”

“Then you have reformed? You won’t fall in love any more—with every woman you see, will you?”

“Faith, Denise, I wouldn’t swear not to as yet. I received a bitter lesson on my fifth floor—and in my travels I turned it to no advantage whatever. Ah! if I had won the love of a sincere, true-hearted, virtuous woman—like you, Denise—perhaps I should have reformed before this!”

“What, monsieur!” said Denise, blushing; “do you mean that I don’t love you?”

“No—you love me like a brother, I know, and your touchingly warm welcome of me, the delight that my return has caused you, show plainly enough your deep affection for me; but, my dear Denise, there is a sweeter, tenderer sentiment which I hoped to inspire in you before you told me that you could never love me. Don’t lower

your eyes, Denise; I am not reproaching you; we cannot control our hearts, and I admit that I did not deserve yours. I tried to accustom myself to look upon you as a sister; that is what I have been trying to do ever since our interview in your aunt's garden. It will be hard, but with time I shall succeed—perhaps. Let us leave that subject; I am so happy to be with you now!—Well! haven't you anything to say to me, Denise?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes! But you must feel the need of rest."

"It is true that my journey has tired me; and my story has kept you up late."

"Come, monsieur; I'll take you to the little summer-house that I have had built in the garden; it makes the prettiest room in the house. I wish I could give you even better quarters——"

"You forget, Denise, that I am no longer the dandy of the *Chaussée-d'Antin*! Just cast your eye at my costume."

"Oh, to me you are always the same, monsieur!"

She took Auguste to the summer-house and left him there with a loving: "Until to-morrow;" then she returned to the house and her own room, saying to herself:

"He thinks that my only feeling for him is friendship; he is very much mistaken; what I feel for him is love! *Mon Dieu*! why did I believe Monsieur Bertrand at that time? Why did I tell him that I didn't love him? This is what comes of lying! But I'll tell him the truth now, because I don't want him to try to look on me as a sister."

XXVII

AVOWALS.—THE PROPOSAL

After travelling about for three years in quest of riches, and finding in all lands the same vices, the same passions, the same folly,—when one returns home even poorer than one went away, how delicious it is to wake beneath a hospitable roof, with faithful friends whom one's evil fortune has not changed, and who are made happy by one's return! It is the harbor after a gale; it is the clear sky after a storm; it is the gleam of dawn after a long night.

Such was Auguste's waking; in his eyes the cottage was a palace, aye, better than a palace, since it held Denise and Coco. He rose, and after revelling for a few moments in the pure air of the garden, he turned his attention to his costume. Not with impunity does one live under the same roof with a lovely girl whom one has once loved, and still loves, although resolved to be nothing more than her friend. Moreover, it is quite natural to try to recover some of one's former attractions, after making one's appearance in the costume of an impoverished wayfarer.

In a short time, the razor had disposed of the beard. But Auguste's modest portmanteau contained only a coat, a waistcoat and almost no linen. He was inspecting it with a dejected air when there came a soft tap at his door and he heard Coco's voice:

"It's me, my kind friend."

Auguste opened the door to the child, who had a large bundle which he placed on the bed.

"What's all this, my friend?" queried Auguste, after he had kissed the little fellow.

"I don't know, my kind friend; it was Denise that told me to bring it to you. Good-bye; I'm going to feed my goat. You didn't see her last night; hurry up and dress yourself and come and say good-morning to her."

When the child had gone, Auguste opened the package, which contained a supply of linen and a paper on which was written:

"Coco gives you this; remember that he didn't refuse your gifts a long time ago."

"Dear Denise!" said Auguste; "how thoughtful of her! And to think of her being able to get them so early! She can't have slept at all—she must have ransacked the village already. If this is the way her friendship works, what would happen if one had her love!"

However, it was a bitter thing to Auguste to accept the girl's gifts; when one is in the habit of giving, it is hard to make up one's mind to receive. He overcame at last the feeling of pride that caused him to hesitate; he realized that it would hurt Denise if he refused, and that consideration decided him to accept her presents.

After completing his toilet, Auguste went into the garden and found Denise there. She came to meet him with the most engaging smile, and a look in which there was something more than friendship. Coco ran to Auguste and said:

"Ah! I know you now—this is the way you used to look."

"Thanks to you, Denise!" said Dalville in an undertone.

But the girl put her hand over his mouth, and he seized the hand and pressed it to his heart without more words. They showed him the cottage, the garden, every nook and corner, and Denise said to him at every step:

“Do you like this? Are you satisfied with the use I have made of your money?”

“What surprises me,” said Auguste, “is that you can build a house with three thousand francs.”

“In the first place, monsieur, we had the land; and then, you see, the cottage has only four rooms and attics above.”

“But that pretty summer-house where I slept last night?”

“Oh! I had that built after my poor aunt’s death. I preferred to live here than in our house. I felt as if I weren’t so far away from you.”

These words were accompanied by another sweet smile; all of which was not calculated to induce Auguste to look upon the lovely girl as his sister simply.

After breakfast they sat in the shade of a clump of lilacs. They talked a long while, having so much to say to each other after a long separation. The girl did not weary of listening to Auguste’s stories of his travels. When he mentioned Bertrand’s name, a sigh escaped him; whereupon Denise took his hand and pressed it affectionately, to give him to understand that he still had friends. He continued his story, but her hand remained in his, and she did not think of withdrawing it.

Engrossed by the pleasure of being with Denise, of exchanging soft glances with her, it did not seem to occur to Auguste that he must look upon her only with a friend’s eyes. Nor did Denise seek to conceal the state of her feelings from him; on the contrary, she wished him to read in the lowest depths of her heart.

Several days passed swiftly. In the morning Auguste and Denise went to walk in the country. Coco always went with them, but his presence did not incommode them; for their eyes alone betrayed their feelings, and an innocent heart has no fear of witnesses. At night, when they were together in the cottage, the hours flew more swiftly still, and when they separated, they exchanged a loving: "Until to-morrow."

Auguste could not conceal from himself the fact that he adored Denise, and, being persuaded that she had no other feeling than friendship for him, he said to himself:

"This girl will end by turning my head. But she loves me only as a brother; she doesn't know how dangerous to my repose her affectionate glances and caresses are. I must leave her and return to Paris; a few days more and I shan't have strength to do it."

On her side Denise said to herself:

"Great heaven! doesn't he see that I love him? I do all that I can to show him! Is it that he doesn't choose to understand me? In that case I must just tell him how it is; and now that he has nothing at all and I have a little money, perhaps he'll not despise the little village girl."

Although he continued to tell himself that he must go away from Denise, Auguste did not leave the cottage, where he was so comfortable. But one evening when he was alone with her, he inquired:

"How does it happen, Denise, that you are not married?"

"Because I didn't choose to marry, monsieur!" she replied, raising her lovely eyes to his.

"But you were in love with someone, surely? You told me so. What obstacle has prevented you from marrying the object of your choice?"

Denise blushed and no longer dared to look at Auguste. At last she faltered in a tremulous voice:

“I—I lied that time, monsieur.”

“How so, Denise?”

“You know, that time in my aunt’s garden, when I told you that I had a sweetheart, it was because Monsieur Bertrand had told me that you didn’t come to the village for fear of falling in love with me; and I longed so to see you that that was why I said I didn’t love you.”

“Dear Denise! is it possible?” cried Auguste, throwing his arms about her.

“Yes, that’s the truth; and since then I’ve been awfully unhappy because I told you that; for you didn’t come again, and you thought I loved somebody else.”

Auguste gazed lovingly at the girl; but soon his brow grew dark; he fixed his eyes on the ground and seemed to be meditating deeply. Amazed by his silence and his depression, she drew nearer to him and said timidly:

“Are you angry because I love you?”

“Ah! Denise, it might once have made me perfectly happy—but now——”

“Well—now?”

Auguste made no reply; and after a moment she asked him:

“Will you marry me, monsieur?”

“Marry you, Denise?”

“Yes; formerly I wouldn’t have dared to hope for such a thing, for you were very rich, and you couldn’t have taken a village girl for your wife. But you have lost the fortune which kept you in fashionable society. You say every day that you no longer care for the fine ladies, the coquettes, who deceived you.—Now, if you want me, I am yours. I haven’t a great fortune, but I have enough for us two; and I will never deceive you!”

Auguste was deeply moved by Denise's affecting offer; but he contented himself with pressing her hand and heaving a profound sigh. She impatiently awaited his reply; his silence made her think that her proposal had offended him; she walked away from him, and, unable to restrain her tears, faltered:

"I made you angry by proposing that you should marry me. Forgive me, monsieur; I forgot that I am only a peasant. I thought that you loved me."

"Ah! I love you, Denise, more than I ever loved! my feeling for you is a hundred times sweeter and fonder than the passions which have led me into so many follies. You are only a peasant, you say! but your virtues and your good qualities make you the equal of a great lady, even though you had not in addition such lovely features, such charming ways, and a melting voice that goes to one's very heart!"

"You love me! Oh! how happy I am! Then you will take me for your wife?"

Auguste gazed tenderly at her, and said at last:

"You shall have my reply to-morrow, Denise."

"To-morrow! Why not at once? Do you need to reflect about it?"

The girl said no more. During the rest of the evening Auguste seemed more affectionate, more in love than ever; his eyes, which were constantly fixed on Denise, expressed the most genuine passion, and when he left her, to return to his summer-house, he pressed her to his heart and seemed unable to tear himself from her arms. He left her at last, and Denise said to herself:

"Oh! he will certainly marry me! but why not say so at once?"

She did not sleep; she was too excited to close her eyes. In default of dreams, her imagination conjured

up a thousand delightful pictures: she saw herself the chosen companion of the man she loved; she passed the rest of her days with him. So charming a future is surely not inferior to the pleasantest dreams, and we do not try to sleep when we possess the reality of happiness.

Day broke at last. Denise rose and spent a longer time than usual at her toilet. That is a venial offence when a woman knows that she is going into the presence of the man whom she wishes to call her husband. She left her room and went into the garden, where she found Auguste every morning; but he was not there, and the girl was surprised that he was still asleep; for she thought that he must have been unable to sleep, like herself, and that he would be in haste to see her.

She seated herself in the shrubbery where they had talked the night before. She could see the summer-house from there, and she waited impatiently for Auguste to come out. But the door did not open, and at last Coco, whom Denise had not yet seen, came running toward her with a letter in his hand.

"Here, my dear Denise, my kind friend gave me this for you," he said, holding out the letter.

"Your kind friend! Why, have you seen Monsieur Auguste already?"

"Oh, yes! he was up before sunrise."

"Where is he now, then?"

"He kissed me and then he went away; I don't know where he went."

Denise had a presentiment of evil; she opened the letter with a trembling hand and read:

"I love you, my dear Denise; do not doubt my love; but shall I join my poverty to your comfort, after I have

lost my money by my own fault? shall I bestow on you the hand of a man who has not even any knowledge of the agricultural labors by which your little property can be made profitable? No, Denise, I am not worthy to be your husband, I cannot make up my mind to live at the expense of a woman who would sacrifice a happy future for me. Doubtless your kind heart led you to offer me your hand; perhaps you even pretended to love me so as to induce me to accept your generous offer; but I must not do it. Adieu, Denise! If I should become rich again, I shall fly to you; but I have no hope of it now. Adieu! I shall come to see you when I have strength enough to look upon you as my sister."

The girl turned deadly pale and dropped the letter, crying:

"He doesn't believe in my love!"

"Well, where's my kind friend? Did he write you where he's gone?"

"Alas! he has abandoned us, he has run away from us, he thinks we don't love him!"

Denise burst into tears; the child ran to her arms and she pressed him to her heart, sobbing:

"Oh! I shall die of grief, and you must tell him that he's the cause of it; then perhaps he'll believe that I loved him!"

XXVIII

VIRGINIE AGAIN

It was very early in the morning when Auguste left the pretty little cottage where he had passed a fortnight which he looked upon as the happiest period in his life. It was not without a mighty effort that he tore himself away from Denise; it requires a deal of courage to leave a woman whom one loves, when she has voluntarily offered one her heart. But we must remember that Auguste had been rich, and that every feeling of pride was not extinct within his breast. His pride could not accustom itself to the idea of offering Denise the hand of a penniless unfortunate; and furthermore he feared that it was from gratitude for what he had done for Coco that the girl offered him her hand. A heart bruised by misfortune is easily frightened; dread of humiliation makes us unjust; a benefaction seems like almsgiving, and consolation is nothing more than condescending pity.

With his little bundle tied to the end of his staff, Auguste started for Paris. When he saw the great city once more, he could not restrain a sigh. But he pulled his hat over his eyes and walked with lowered head, in dread of meeting some former acquaintance. However, it is no crime to be poor; why, then, should the unfortunate seem to avoid men's eyes when so many scoundrels go about with their heads in the air? Why should one be any more ashamed to say: "I haven't a sou," than to say: "I owe a hundred thousand francs"? Because in society we see and seek and care for none but those who

have money ; because we too often close our eyes to the source of the wealth of a multitude of schemers who cut a dash at the expense of the scores of families they have ruined, and who from their magnificent equipages look down in derision on those whom they have reduced to destitution ; because we pardon all sorts of vices in the man who is able to cover them with gold, and refuse to pardon a trifling peccadillo in a poor devil ; because we lavish attentions on a Messalina arrayed in silk and diamonds, and close our doors to a girl who has given herself for love to a man who cannot support her. All this is very sad, but it is all true.

Auguste was careful not to go near Rue Saint-Georges ; he went in the direction of the Marais. It was necessary that he should be most economical in his outlay, and he found in an old house on Rue de Berry, a closet, said to be furnished, on the sixth floor, which he could hire for fifteen francs a month. He paid half of the first month's rent in advance.

The man who formerly passed his life in dissipation, who set the fashion in manners and style, who was sought after and fêted, for whom women disputed at parties, and whom they were proud to subjugate,—the brilliant Dalville found himself reduced to the necessity of occupying a garret and sleeping on a wretched pallet. When he entered the miserable den he had just hired, he could not control a feeling of regret, and he threw himself on a chair which wavered under him. As he glanced at the walls, only partially covered by a few tattered strips of paper ; as he contemplated the furniture of his closet, and the tumbledown roofs near by, Auguste recalled old Dorfeuil's room ; he remembered especially the old man's story and he dropped his head on his hands, saying :

“And that did not reform me!”

In a few moments, summoning his courage, he took his portfolio, glanced over a list that he had made of all the people who owed him money, and determined to spend the next day calling upon his debtors. At that moment, the payment of a single debt would be of great service to him; for, despite the economy with which he had travelled, he had but eleven francs left after paying his rent for a fortnight. He had given his name to the landlady as a teacher of music and drawing; but was he likely to find any pupils, and how could he live before he received the price of his lessons? Such reflections were ill adapted to make the aspect of his abode more attractive. If only his former companion had been there to comfort him and revive his courage! Again and again, impelled by the force of habit, Auguste turned and looked about the room for Bertrand; but, just as he was on the point of calling him, he remembered his desertion, and his heart was torn anew.

For a moment Auguste had thought of going to his former lodgings to inquire whether Schtrack had seen Bertrand, and whether the ex-corporal was in Paris; but he abandoned the idea when he reflected that he might meet Bertrand in the old concierge's quarters, and that he ought not to risk encountering a man who, by his ingratitude, had rendered himself unworthy of being regretted.

It was by thinking of Denise, by recalling the happy moments that he had passed with her, that Auguste strove to forget his deplorable plight. He was well aware that he would always find shelter under Denise's roof, but he could not make up his mind to live at her expense.

“It may be that it was from compassion that she offered me her hand,” he said to himself.

On the following day, after carefully brushing his old coat, and trying to dissemble his destitution, Auguste set out to visit his debtors. His first two calls were not fortunate; one man was dead, the other had gone to Bordeaux, whither Auguste could not go to seek him. At his third attempt he was more fortunate; the debtor was a young man who, like Dalville, was devoted to pleasure; he was in the act of performing his second toilet when his creditor was ushered into his presence.

One does not put oneself out for a poorly dressed person, and the young man, who did not recognize Dalville, said to him while continuing to tie his cravat:

“What do you want?”

“First of all, to see you. Is it possible that Léon does not recognize me?”

Surprised at being addressed by his baptismal name, the young man bestowed a contemptuous glance upon Auguste and said:

“Deuce take me if I know you. Can it be that we have ever had anything to do with each other?”

“Yes, monsieur, for Auguste Dalville has had the privilege of doing you a favor more than once.”

“Auguste Dalville!” cried the young man, turning his head once more; “what! can it be you, my dear fellow?”

“Myself!”

“Oh! it’s impossible! you are dressed like a high-wayman! Are you just out of prison?”

“No, thank God! unfortunate as I am, I have never put myself in the way of being imprisoned.”

“Look you, my dear fellow, that doesn’t prevent one’s being an honest man; I’ve been to Sainte-Pélagie more than once myself, and it’s likely that I shall go again. Poor Auguste!—Damn this knot! I shall never get it

tied.—Well, what chance brings you here, my dear friend? You haven't been seen anywhere for a century."

"It's three years since I left Paris; I have been in Italy and England."

"The devil you say! Tell me, is it true that the English tie their cravats like a groom?"

"That isn't the kind of thing I gave my attention to on my travels. As I have told you, Léon, I am not in luck; but when I was rich you had recourse to my purse more than once. I lent you more than a thousand francs; half of that sum would be of great service to me now, and I have come to ask you to pay me five hundred francs on account of what you owe me."

"Parbleu! my dear Auguste, you have chosen a very bad time. I lost at roulette yesterday all the money I had. I determined to put my luck to the test. I have nothing left, and if I can't pick up ten louis or so to-day, to take a lovely little woman to the Bois, I am a lost man. My charmer will probably go to the Bois with somebody else, and you can understand—Does my cravat look all right?"

"I thought that you had a better heart, Léon. You will find ten louis to take your charmer to drive, but you can't find them for me, to whom you owe them, and who am in a lamentable plight."

"I don't say that I won't find them for you, my dear fellow. Come again in a few days; I promise to put aside all I win at cards, and it shall be for you. Poor Dalville—on my honor, I am distressed.—This corner of my collar won't stay in place; it's terribly annoying, it spoils all the harmony of a costume."

Auguste left the young dandy's apartment, wondering how he could ever have been the friend of a man whose head was as empty as his heart. He called upon others of his debtors: some were out, some had moved. He

returned home, tired out and with little hope of faring better on the morrow. For several days he persistently pursued them; but the majority were not to be found or not to be seen; those whom he succeeded in seeing never had any money, and it was impossible for him to catch young Léon at home again. He sought fruitlessly the abode of the Marquis de Cligneval; but one day, as he was going home, he saw monsieur le marquis, ran after him and stopped him.

"What do you want of me?" said Monsieur de Cligneval haughtily.

"I have something to say to you, monsieur."

"I don't know you."

"You don't know me!" cried Auguste angrily, standing in front of the marquis, who was about to walk away. His tone and the flash in his eyes evidently refreshed Monsieur de Cligneval's memory, for he replied, trying to smile:

"Oh! I beg pardon! a thousand pardons! It's Monsieur Dalville. I was so engrossed—I am going out to dinner—I am late, and——"

"Monsieur, you have owed me money for a long, long time, which you borrowed for a few days only."

"I, owe you money? Oh! you are mistaken, I assure you."

"What, monsieur?"

"I beg pardon—I paid you! I give you my word that I paid you, a long time ago; that's why you have forgotten it."

"You dare to assert——"

"My dear sir, you confuse my debt with somebody else's; really I paid you. Think carefully and you will remember. When you lend to a number of people, you get them mixed and forget; it's like boston—there are

people who always ask you twice for the trick.—Adieu! au revoir! I am going out to dine.”

Monsieur de Cligneval was already far away. Auguste stood still, petrified by his debtor's impudence; but what is one to do with a man who denies a debt, when one has no evidence thereof? To thrash him would be some compensation at least, but the law would put you in the wrong.

Auguste went home more depressed and dejected than ever, and, to cap the climax of his misfortunes, fatigue and anxiety had inflamed his blood. He was consumed by fever; he was alone, on a bag of straw, and ere long it would be impossible for him to obtain those things which were essential for his restoration to health.

Stretched on his bed, where he had passed the whole day, Auguste courted sleep, which avoided his eyes. He was in pain, he breathed with difficulty, and sounds of mirth disturbed the silence of his abode. The person who lived below him seemed to be singing over her work; her voice pierced the thin ceiling that separated her from the hapless invalid, and the latter, on his bed of suffering, distinguished from time to time a vaudeville air or the refrain of a *chansonnette*.

“Those people haven't a fever like me,” he said to himself. “Oh! this is an excellent time to be philosophical, but nature speaks louder than philosophy.”

After a sleepless night, the poor fellow, devoured by thirst, found that he had no more water with which to satisfy it. He summoned all his strength, left his bed, and dragged himself down to the concierge's room; for he dared not apply to any neighbors, and moreover he was alone, between two lofts, on his sixth floor.

“Oh! are you sick, monsieur?” cried the concierge, at sight of Auguste.

"Yes, I have been suffering greatly since yesterday."

"You must take care of yourself and not go out."

"Oh! that would be impossible!"

"Leave your key outside, monsieur; I'll come up to-night to see if you want anything."

Auguste thanked the woman, crawled back to his garret with much difficulty, and threw himself on his bed once more.

The concierge, like all of her class, loved to talk, and very soon all the lodgers who stopped at her lodge knew that there was on the sixth floor a young man with a very distinguished bearing who was probably going to have inflammation of the lungs.

Among the persons who stopped to chat with the concierge was the singer who lived below the sick man. This singer was no other than Virginie, who had not succeeded in making a fortune by riotous living. Dissipation soon banishes the hues of health, late hours circle the eyes, fatigue of all sorts impairs beauty, and beauty was almost the sole possession of Virginie, who, with three years added to her age, had fewer lovers than of yore. All this was the reason why she was living in the Marais, in a very modest fifth floor apartment; that she often passed her evenings in working, because she no longer had some pleasure party for every evening; and lastly, that she sang over her work, because she had retained her voice and her cheerfulness.

Virginie had a kind heart, she had never sinned except through excess of sensibility. There are women who have no sensibility except where pleasure is concerned, but Virginie was still capable of sympathy with the unfortunate. On learning that there was a young man above her who was alone and ill, Virginie asked the concierge:

"Have you been up to see if he wanted anything?"

"I haven't been yet because I've got to watch my stew; but I'll go up to-night."

"Well! you are a good one! Suppose the man gets sicker before then? I'll go myself. I'm only sorry I didn't know it sooner, for I sang all last evening, and when a person is feverish he don't like trills; but I was in good voice! I could have sung *Armide*! I'm going up to see my neighbor. He's young, you say?"

"Why, yes—twenty-nine or thereabouts."

"Poor boy! perhaps he's lovesick. But no, men never lose their health for love. I'm curious to see him; if he was old, I'd go all the same; but a young man is always more alluring."

Virginie went upstairs, and kept on to the sixth, passing her own door without stopping. The key was on the outside of Auguste's door.

"When a man lives in this hole," thought Virginie, "he don't eat green peas in January." And she tapped softly on the door, saying aloud: "It's your neighbor from downstairs, monsieur, come to ask if you want anything."

There was no reply, so she decided to open the door noiselessly. She entered the hovel, in comparison with which her room was a palace. She went to the bed on which lay the sick man, whose fever had increased, and who no longer had the strength to open his eyes. She leaned over him and gave a little shriek when she recognized Auguste.

That shriek caused the invalid to open his eyes; he tried to give Virginie his hand, while she threw herself upon him, kissed him again and again, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and the next moment drenched his face with her tears, crying:

"It is you, Auguste! it is really you! O mon Dieu! in this garret! on this wretched bed! My poor dear! sick, alone—and I didn't know it! Poor Auguste! and I sang last night while he was groaning here! Oh! I feel as if I should choke! I can't say any more."

But at last Virginie realized that her tears and kisses were no longer sufficient for the invalid, who motioned that he was consumed by thirst.

"Wait—wait, my dear," she said, "I'll give you—Great God! there's nothing here but water! Why, that's no good—it increases the fever. I'll go—the doctor must come right away; I'll go and fetch him. I'm going. Don't be impatient, my friend; I won't be long; and after this you won't be alone any more; I shan't leave you again!"

Virginie ran to the door, returned to the bed, pulled the clothes over the sick man, arranged his head, then ran downstairs four at a time, and arrived at the concierge's door all out of breath, saying:

"A doctor! where's there a doctor?"

"Why, there's several in the quarter. Is the gentleman sicker?"

"His address—quick!"

"A doctor's address? There's one on this street—yonder, next to the fruit store; then there's the one that bled me; but——"

Virginie was no longer listening; she was already at the door the concierge had pointed out. She ran up to the doctor's room and begged him to come instantly to see a sick man, in the tone that only women can assume when the object of their affection is involved. The doctor made no reply but took his hat, which was much better, and followed Virginie, who led the way to Auguste's garret. He ascended the six flights almost as quickly as

she did, and when he entered the room apparently saw nothing but the invalid. All honor to the men who devote their lives to relieving the ills of mankind, and who show the same zeal for the poor as for the rich. Their number is large, and although Molière did poke fun at the doctors, doubtless he would be the first to do them justice to-day.

Virginie gazed anxiously at the doctor's face while he was feeling the invalid's pulse. His eyes gave no favorable indication; while Auguste, heedless of everything that was going on about him, seemed neither to see nor to hear anything.

"Well, monsieur?" queried Virginie at last.

"The young man is in bad shape; he has a high fever and there is every reason to expect that it will increase; however, with extreme care, I hope we shall save him."

"Oh, monsieur, don't neglect anything, I beg you!"

"But he is very badly off here; the room is so small, there is so little air, and the sun beats down so fiercely on the roofs, and makes these garrets burning hot; this is a very unhealthy place."

"Oh! he shall leave this garret this very day; he shall live in my room as long as he's sick. It's right below here; he'll be much more comfortable there, for it's a good size, at least—one can turn round in it. He'd have been there before this if I could have carried him alone. If you would be kind enough to help me, monsieur, it would soon be done!"

"Let's try it, mademoiselle."

And the doctor went to the bed and lifted the only mattress that there was on the straw; Virginie did the same on the other side, and thus they carried Auguste to the floor below and laid him upon the only bed in the room.

"Where will you sleep, mademoiselle?" queried the doctor.

"Oh! that don't worry me, monsieur. I'll bring down the straw bed from upstairs; indeed, I shan't feel like sleeping as long as he's sick."

The doctor looked at her again, then wrote a prescription and took his leave, promising to come again early the next morning.

When Virginie was alone, she looked at the prescription and tried to read it.

"Bless my soul!" she muttered, "how badly these doctors write! like cats. 'Syrup of—infusion of'—No matter, the druggist will understand; this much is clear, that here's syrups and infusions—consequently, money. Poor Auguste! I'm quite sure he hasn't any. And I haven't much more. But never mind—I have got to find some. He gave me enough when he was rich. I must go at once and get whatever he needs."

Virginie took her purse and went out to buy what was required for the draught the doctor had ordered. She did not amuse herself by babbling with the concierge, but made haste back to her room to nurse the sick man. His fever had changed to delirium; he did not know her, and he seemed to be much worse. Virginie nursed him with redoubled zeal. She succeeded, not without difficulty, in making him take the potion prescribed for him. She did not take one moment's rest during the night; she was constantly beside the sick-bed, leaving it only to return to her work. Her work was making linen garments, for since her opportunities for pleasure had fallen off, she had realized that in order to live something more was required than fine eyes and a fetching smile. This work brought her but little money; but she redoubled her efforts when she had Auguste to care for.

While she worked, Virginie kept her eyes on the invalid.

"Poor boy!" she would say to herself; "his travels evidently didn't bring him luck. But how does it happen that good old Bertrand isn't with him? He must be dead, not to be with Auguste. He was a true friend, he was! not like those popinjays who swindled him! And Denise, who loved him so dearly! If she knew he was in this condition! Suppose I should write to her? But no, that might make Auguste angry; perhaps he's seen her again, and they've had a row; one can never tell! I must cure him first; then he will tell me all his adventures."

The doctor came the next day, as he had promised; he was unable as yet to give a definite opinion, but he agreed to come again in the evening, and told Virginie to follow the same treatment.

For three days Auguste was very ill. The doctor was not sparing of his visits, and Virginie followed all his prescriptions to the letter. But in the afternoon of the third day she found nothing in her purse, and she had no work ready to carry back. She needed money, however, for a thousand things that her patient must have. Virginie was not at a loss; she took off her bracelets and earrings, the sole relics of the days of her early prosperity, and sold them to a jeweller as gayly as if she were going to a party.

The doctor's treatment and Virginie's nursing were not thrown away. On the fourth day Auguste was better; he was no longer delirious and was surprised to find himself in a room which he did not recognize. He pressed Virginie's hand and would have spoken; but the doctor had prescribed perfect rest, so Virginie said to him:

"Hush! wait till you're better before you talk; meanwhile, don't worry about anything; you're in my room, and I'll take care of you as well as if you had a dozen black servants. All that I ask you is to drink your medicine like a good boy, and think of nothing but rose-bushes. When you are getting better, I'll sing as much as you want me to; I'll even go so far as to dance, if that will amuse you, so as to bring back your spirits."

Auguste smiled and held his peace. He continued to improve, but his convalescence bade fair to be very long; and as a sick man always requires innumerable things, the jewelry money was soon expended. Thereupon, while Auguste was asleep, Virginie looked over her wardrobe to see what she had that she could do without. In reality it contained nothing that was not strictly necessary, but she succeeded in finding several things of which she made a bundle, saying to herself:

"This will rid me of a lot of old stuff that I am sick to death of."

And the bundle went to join the jewels.

When Auguste had recovered a little strength, he was able to tell Virginie the story of his adventures. When she learned that Bertrand had voluntarily left his master, she dropped a glass of medicine that she was about to hand to Auguste, and exclaimed:

"My arms have gone back on me! That Bertrand, whom I always thought worthy of being embalmed! whom I looked upon as a faithful dog in his attachment to you! You can't trust a man! My friend, the English bear must have changed all his feelings!"

But when Auguste told her of his stay at Denise's cottage, Virginie interrupted him to describe the peasant girl's grief and despair when she learned of his departure—in short, all her love for him.

"Is it possible?" said Auguste; "she really loves me? Then she did not deceive me! it wasn't pity that made her offer me her hand!"

"Does she love you! She adores you, monsieur. The poor child made me feel so sad. She cried so! But you men are unique! when a woman loves you, you're surprised, and when she doesn't love you, you're surprised too."

"Oh! how happy you make me, Virginie!"

"In that case, get well right away, and go and console poor Denise."

"Oh no! I shall not go there."

"What's that? you won't go? You know that she loves you, that she is in despair at your absence, and you won't go back to her?"

"I am destitute—I can't accept her hand."

"My dear friend, that's a piece of delicacy that I can't understand. When a person loves us, what's theirs is ours; and if a prince should fall in love with me, although I haven't any more money than you have, I shouldn't hesitate a moment about marrying him."

Auguste held his peace, and Virginie said nothing further on a subject that seemed to distress him. To restore the sick man's strength, he was given no more infusions to drink; old wine and rich soups were prescribed by the doctor, and Virginie, who searched her drawers in a vain endeavor to make money, decided to sell a shawl which was her most beautiful possession, and which she almost never laid aside.

But Auguste saw how much he was costing Virginie, and his distress on that account retarded his convalescence. He watched her as she worked incessantly, often passing a large part of the night at her sewing, and he sighed, as he said to himself:

"She is killing herself for me! and I shall never be able to requite all her care of me!"

When Virginie returned after procuring a sum of money by means of her remaining resource, Auguste noticed that she was without the shawl she usually wore.

"Where have you been, Virginie?" he asked in a feeble voice.

"For a little walk, to take the air. I saw that you were asleep and didn't need me."

"Why aren't you wearing your shawl?"

"My shawl? Why, I didn't put it on because it's too warm."

"You had it on when you went out."

"Did I?—Well, the truth is that I've lent it to a friend of mine who's going to a party to-night; but she'll give it back."

"You are deceiving me, Virginie."

"No, monsieur, I am not deceiving you."

"I am costing you a great deal; and you deprive yourself of everything in order to take care of me, so that I may lack nothing! You are stripping yourself clean for me!"

"What are you talking about, Monsieur Auguste? I deprive myself of everything! Let me tell you, monsieur, that I deprive myself of nothing. Who told you that I am not well fixed, that I haven't money put by?"

"And you work a great part of the night!"

"I work because it amuses me, and because I don't care to sleep. The fact is that I have all I want; I had a hoard; I am certainly at liberty to spend it as I please.—The idea of telling me that he is a burden to me! How shameful of him! I, whom he has been kind to so many times! And he is angry because I am taking care of him!—Monsieur would prefer that somebody else should do

it, perhaps. If you give me any more nonsense like that, I'll throw the stew out of the window. As for my shawl, it's true that I haven't got it now; but I didn't like it. In the first place, the color isn't in fashion any longer; and then I don't want a flower pattern—it's bad form."

Auguste said no more; he simply sighed as he took Virginie's hands in his; and she pretended to be more lighthearted than ever, and sang all day to prove that she did not regret her shawl.

The doctor came to see his patient; he found him much better, and complimented Virginie on her nursing. She, although she had no idea how she was going to pay him, asked him to tell her how much she owed him. But the doctor replied that he never charged anything when he went higher than the fourth floor; and he ran away from the thanks of Auguste and Virginie, enjoining anew upon the convalescent to be careful and to wait until his strength had returned before going out.

"There's a mighty fine man!" cried Virginie, looking after the doctor. "He isn't handsome; certainly no one can say he's handsome; in fact, one eye's smaller than the other. But for all that he's been a little Cupid in my eyes ever since I saw what zeal he showed in his care of you."

Auguste smiled; Virginie's remarks often made his eyes sparkle; but when he thought of his plight, his brow darkened and he sighed, despite all the efforts of his nurse, who said to him constantly:

"You didn't use to sigh like that when you made love to me."

Auguste was anxious to get up and go out, but he was not strong enough; and yet Virginie gave him everything that the doctor ordered. But his convalescence seemed certain to be very slow, and although she told

Auguste every day that he must not worry, that she had money enough to last a long while, Virginie discovered one morning that she had nothing left of the proceeds of the sale of her shawl.

But the doctor, who had called on the evening before, had said that Auguste could eat chicken, and Virginie, after searching her boxes, her drawers and her purse, where she found nothing, muttered under her breath:

“It’s no use for me to look; there’s nothing to raise money on—not even enough to buy a lark; and my work won’t be done till day after to-morrow! No matter! if I have to put myself in pawn, he shall eat chicken to-day!”

And Virginie put on her cap and the little neckerchief which had replaced her shawl; then, leaving Auguste still asleep, she stole softly from her room, saying to herself:

“I won’t come back without a chicken.”

XXIX

WHAT WAS TO BE EXPECTED.—RETURN TO THE VILLAGE

Virginie walked along the street, with no very clear idea as to where she was going; she cudgelled her brains to think of somebody who might accommodate her, but the memory is often in default when one asks it the name of a true friend. If C  zarine had been in Paris, Virginie would not have hesitated to call on her, because she knew her kindness of heart; but C  zarine was then

on the track of her Théodore, who had left the capital, and her Théodore was likely to lead her a long way.

Virginie's other acquaintances offered too unpromising a prospect; there were several to whom she would not have dreamed of applying. However, the result of her reflections was always the same:—"I must have a chicken for Auguste, and I will have one. I don't know just how I shall do it; but whenever I've taken it into my head to do a thing, I've always succeeded in doing it, and it's often been a question of things much more interesting than a chicken; it would be a deuce of a go, if I couldn't acquit myself creditably in the matter of a little chicken!"

And Virginie stopped in front of poultry shops and cookshops; she walked back and forth, cudgelling her brains to no purpose; she found no money, and she heaved a sigh as she gazed at the delicacies with which she desired to regale the convalescent.

The amusing faces that Virginie made—her decent dress did not indicate want—and the way she glared at the roast chickens, made the passers-by smile now and then, for they saw in the grisette's emotion only an outburst of gluttony; and she, seeing them smile as they looked at her, muttered between her teeth: "The idiots! Suppose they do laugh in my face—what difference does that make to me? Isn't there one of them who will be polite enough to offer me a chicken? Men are getting to be brutes!"

For ten minutes Virginie had been walking back and forth before a cookshop, beside which was the small establishment of a linen-draper. Virginie had not noticed the proprietress, because she had no eyes for anything but the chickens; but through the gloves, ribbons and dry-goods in her window, the tradeswoman had noticed

Virginie, whose strange behavior was calculated to arouse curiosity. Women have a sentimental instinct which enables them to understand at once what men cannot divine in an hour, or what they cannot divine at all. The young linen-draper saw in Virginie's eyes that it was not gluttony that caused her to stand in contemplation before her neighbor's merchandise. She went out of her shop by the rear door,—her yard and that of the cookshop were the same,—entered the cookshop, purchased a fine, fat chicken, wrapped it in two thicknesses of paper, and returned to her own shop by the same road. Then she stood in her doorway and looked at Virginie, not knowing how to proffer her gift. For some time Virginie paid no heed to the young woman; but the latter gazed at her with such a meaning expression, and seemed so anxious to speak to her, that Virginie walked toward the shop-door.

The young tradeswoman at once said to her, in a low tone and blushing hotly:

“Madame, you have forgotten your purse, haven't you? If you would allow me to offer you——”

And as she spoke, she thrust the chicken under Virginie's arm, trembling as if she had done a ridiculous thing; but one often trembles much more when doing a kind deed. Virginie could only squeeze the young woman's hand and say:

“You guessed my plight. Ah! if you knew how happy you have made me! if you knew why—But you will see me again; I will come again to thank you and pay my debt to you.”

“Yes, yes, madame,” said the young tradeswoman; and she retreated, sorely embarrassed, to the back of her shop, while Virginie, light as a feather, tripped gayly homeward, her chicken under her arm, saying to herself:

"I knew that I'd get one! I never lose hope, I don't!"

However, the chicken had not yet reached Auguste. At a street corner, Virginie, who probably was looking at her feet and nothing else, was roughly jostled by a man who knocked the chicken to the ground.

"You infernal idiot!" cried Virginie, stooping to pick up the chicken. But her voice caught the ears of the man who had jostled her, and who had simply apologized and kept on his way. He stopped, retraced his steps and exclaimed in his turn:

"Why—yes! ten thousand bayonets! it's Mamzelle Virginie! Morbleu! perhaps she'll be able to tell me something about him."

"Hallo! it's Bertrand!" said Virginie, as she recognized the ex-corporal; "it's good old Ber—But what am I saying! he's a villain, an ungrateful, hardhearted wretch, and I don't like him any more. Let me carry my chicken—don't hold me, monsieur."

"Whether you like me or not, mademoiselle, isn't the question just at this moment. One word, if you please: have you seen him, do you know where he is, what's become of him?"

"Of whom?"

"Morbleu! my lieutenant, Monsieur Auguste."

"On my word! do I know where he is? What a question! when he's been living in my room a fortnight!"

"He's in your room?—I have found him! I shall see him again!"

In his joy, Bertrand embraced Virginie and once more knocked the hapless chicken to the ground. This time it fell into the gutter and Virginie was ready to weep.

"Won't you please let me alone!" she cried; "this chicken's for Auguste; and after I've had so much

trouble to get it, you'll be the cause of his not being able to eat it!"

"Oh! don't cry! I'll buy you more chickens—ten—twenty—an ox, if you choose! But, for the love of God, take me to my lieutenant straight away. I am in haste to embrace him!"

"What! then you still care for him?"

"Care for him! Who can ever have doubted my attachment, my devotion to his person?"

"Then you didn't abandon him in England on purpose?"

"Abandon him! when it was in his service—for his welfare——"

"Oh! dear old Bertrand! I was perfectly sure he was a good fellow. Come, my little Bertrand, let's go to Auguste. My! but he'll be glad when he knows that you are still worthy of his affection!"

Virginie and Bertrand walked toward Rue de Berry. On the way, Virginie told the old servant of all the disasters that had befallen Auguste, and of the serious illness that he had had. As he listened to these details, Bertrand wiped his eyes now and then and exclaimed:

"Sacrebleu! why didn't I find him sooner? But I only returned to Paris the day before yesterday; and I intended to go to Montfermeil to-morrow to look for him, hoping to be luckier there than in this city, where Schtrack and I have been scouring every quarter for two days, without success."

At last they reached the house in which Virginie lived; as they went upstairs Bertrand was as excited as if he were going to see a long lost son; and Virginie said to him:

"You mustn't show yourself to Auguste right away; he is still very weak, and the sight of you might cause

him too much emotion. You understand, don't you, Bertrand?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"I'll go in first, and prepare Auguste gently; then I'll motion to you."

"Yes, mademoiselle, I'll wait in another room."

"No; as I have but one, you must wait on the landing. I'll leave the door ajar."

"All right; but don't wait long before you give me the signal, for I am crazy to have my arms around him."

They arrived at Virginie's door; she opened it, then partly closed it, and Bertrand stood as close as possible, hardly daring to breathe.

Auguste had risen and was sitting at a window, impatiently awaiting Virginie, whose long absence made him anxious.

"Here I am, my friend," she said, as she entered the room; and she hung about Auguste with as much embarrassment as she had shown in front of the cookshop. "Here I am; I've been rather long, but—but—it was because I met someone who is much better than a chicken."

"You met someone?"

"Yes—someone who—someone——"

Before Virginie could think of what she wanted to say, Bertrand, unable to contain himself any longer, opened the door, rushed to Auguste, and threw his arms about him, crying:

"It was me, sacrebleu! it was me! But I can't stay hidden any longer; I must embrace him!"

Bertrand could not make up his mind for some minutes to release his hold of Auguste, and Virginie exclaimed reproachfully:

"There! you see! he couldn't wait till I motioned to him; he'll make Auguste worse!"

"No," said the convalescent, "no, happiness never does that! My poor fellow! so you have come back!"

"And you could believe that I abandoned you!" said Bertrand, taking Auguste's hand. "You doubted the love of your old comrade, your faithful servant!—I admit that my hurried departure must have surprised you; but when you know!"

"You are here, Bertrand, and everything is forgotten!"

"Oh! listen to me first, and then tell me if I behaved so very badly.—You remember that I left you in the common room of a village tavern where we had just breakfasted. I had just paid our bill when, as I crossed the courtyard, I saw a man whose face attracted my attention, and whom I recognized instantly as our rascal of a Destival."

"Destival!" cried Auguste.

"The man who robbed you!" said Virginie.

"He was just getting into a post-chaise when I caught sight of him. He couldn't have seen me, but the carriage had started before I recovered from my surprise. So then, without taking the time to warn you, because I didn't want to lose a minute for fear our man would escape me, I ran to the stable, saddled my horse, and galloped off in pursuit of our rascal. I soon overtook the post-chaise; but I knew that, in a foreign country, it would be a hard matter to make the villain disgorge, and that I could not rely on anyone but myself to do justice. So I followed the carriage, awaiting a favorable opportunity to see my man in private. For two days the infernal chaise stopped only to change horses; at last, at the end of the second day, they stopped at the posting inn, and my rascal, who evidently needed rest, entered the inn. I lost no time in following him, and asked to

“speak to the traveller who had just come in. They showed me his room. I went upstairs, entered the room, and began by locking myself in with our man, who, when he saw me, nearly fainted in an easy-chair. I went up to him, took his arm, and said to him: ‘You are a thief, you ruined my master, but you won’t ruin anybody else; I taught you once to handle weapons, and we’ll see if you remember my lessons. Here are two pistols—take one. We shall be very comfortable in this room—four paces is distance enough when one doesn’t want to miss. Let’s make haste.’

“Instead of taking the pistol I handed him, the miserable wretch threw himself at my feet and begged for mercy. I demanded your money back. He took a wallet out of his pocket, showed me a hundred and sixty thousand francs in notes of the Bank of France, and swore that that was all that was left of what he took away from Paris. I concluded that that was better than nothing, and that I ought to get your money back for you rather than kill the villain. So I took the wallet, and, leaving the scoundrel more dead than alive, I went out of his room and locked him in. I remounted my horse and rode back as fast as I could to the place where I had left you; when I got there, my horse was foundered and I didn’t find you. I rode about in all directions, but no one could tell me anything about you. I started for Scotland, where we had intended to go. I passed three weeks visiting every corner there, even the smallest villages, but I wasn’t any more fortunate. At last I decided to return to France, and I got to Paris the day before yesterday. My first thought was to go and question Schtrack; he hadn’t seen you and he didn’t know mademoiselle’s address; we began to walk the streets trying to find you. But here you are! I have found you. I can give you what I have

rescued of your property.—That is a report of my conduct, lieutenant; now, are you angry with me?”

For all reply, Auguste opened his arms to Bertrand, who handed him the wallet; while Virginie capered about the room, dancing with the chairs, and tossing her cap in the air, crying:

“Vive Bertrand! Auguste isn’t poor any more! we’ll have a high old time now!”

When the first outburst of joyous excitement had subsided, Auguste told Bertrand what he had done since he left him. He did not conceal from him the miserable plight to which he was reduced when Virginie came to his garret. He told him all that she had done for him—how she had worked and sat up all night, and all the sacrifices that she had undergone every day in order to provide him with whatever he required.

During this story, Virginie tried to make Auguste keep quiet by saying:

“That isn’t true; he makes too much of it; don’t believe him, Bertrand. Anyhow, if I did do all that, it must have been because I enjoyed it.”

But Bertrand, who could not listen unmoved to Auguste’s narrative, ran to Virginie, took her in his arms and kissed her, saying:

“That was fine! that was mighty fine!”

“Yes, but you are squeezing me too tight, Bertrand.”

Melancholy thoughts gave place to thoughts of happiness. Auguste no longer sighed when he thought of Denise. He was already longing to be with her, he burned to see her again, to requite her love; for after all that Virginie had told him he could no longer doubt the village maiden’s heart. But he was unable to go to Montfermeil at once; however, as happiness is a great restorer of health, after two days passed in forming

delightful plans for the future, Auguste was in condition to go out.

Before going to the village, where he expected to stay for some time, Auguste put his affairs in order. He went to his old notary and instructed him to invest his funds, keeping back only so much as was necessary for the execution of his plans. He intended to assure Virginie's future; since she was no longer as young as she had once been, she was anxious to carry on a little business. Auguste hired a pretty shop for her and stocked it with embroideries and novelties, and Virginie became a dealer in small wares. She proudly took her seat behind her counter, after having a sign put over her door: *A la Pucelle*; and she swore to Auguste that she proposed thenceforth to devote herself exclusively to her business.

Auguste received Virginie's thanks and her kindest regards for Denise, whom she did not propose to visit until her new line of conduct had covered her former aberrations with oblivion. He was on the point of starting for Montfermeil with Bertrand, when Virginie exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! I forgot the little shopkeeper and the chicken! I meant to recommend her to you, so that you might at least buy your gloves of her."

"What shopkeeper? what chicken?" inquired Auguste.

Virginie told of her adventure on the day she met Bertrand. Auguste, after expressing anew to Virginie his gratitude for all that she had done for him during his sickness, determined to call upon the young woman who had displayed so much delicacy in conferring a favor, and to thank her. He took Virginie in his cabriolet and they drove to the young linen-draper's shop.

The cabriolet stopped at her door and the three occupants alighted. The young woman was amazed; she

was not accustomed to having customers come in a carriage to buy needles and thread. But she blushed when she recognized Virginie, who entered first, saying to Auguste:

"It was madame here, who was so kind to me when you were convalescent."

Auguste stepped forward to salute the young tradeswoman, who was sorely embarrassed by the thanks he expressed. But before she could speak, an old man, who was in the back shop, and whom they had not noticed, came toward them, crying:

"Daughter! Anna! it is our place to thank this generous man! He is our benefactor! It is he to whom I owe my life and the happiness of seeing you happy!"

Auguste looked at the old man and recognized poor Dorfeuil; and before he had recovered from his surprise, father and daughter were at his feet, covering his hand with tears of gratitude.

Thereupon it was the turn of Bertrand and Virginie to demand explanations. Auguste tried to slink away, but old Dorfeuil held him fast while he told of all that he owed him, and finished his story by saying to Auguste:

"As you see, your benefaction brought us good luck. I have paid my debt; and in the last three years, my Anna, having succeeded in all her undertakings, has been able to set up in business here, where I am passing my declining years with her, in peace."

Bertrand embraced Auguste again, Virginie embraced everybody, and they parted, promising to meet again. Virginie returned to her shop, from which she could not be absent longer, and Auguste drove off at last toward Denise's village.

As they drew near Montfermeil his heart beat fast. He looked at Bertrand and said:

"We are going to see her! Oh! if you knew how they welcomed me, how they fêted me when I was unfortunate!"

"And yet you left them!"

"My dear fellow, I had nothing to offer Denise."

"And now that you are much richer than she is, what if she should take her turn at refusing you? Then there'd be no end to it. Lovers have no common sense."

Instead of taking the road to the village, Auguste could not resist the desire to go by the little wood path where he had kissed the little milkmaid long ago. When he was near the place where Jean le Blanc ran away, he saw a small boy on a donkey in the woods; and a little farther on was a young girl, sitting at the foot of a tree.

"There they are!" cried Auguste.

In a twinkling he had jumped out of the cabriolet; he ran into the woods to where the girl sat, threw himself at her feet, covered her hand with kisses, and said:

"It's I, Denise; I have come back to you, never to leave you again."

The girl was in doubt as to whether she was awake; she gazed at Auguste, who was fashionably dressed as in the old days, while Coco ran up to them, saying:

"Here's my kind friend! he's dressed like he was the day I broke the bowl."

"Is it really you?" said Denise. "Oh! if you knew how your letter grieved me! Wicked! to leave me because you were poor! to dare to say that I didn't love you! that you wouldn't come to see me again till you had ceased to love me! Is that what your coming now means? Oh! tell me quickly, don't let me hope for happiness—it is too hard to be cheated out of what one longs for!"

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Auguste made no other reply than to press her to his heart, while his eyes told the sweet girl that it was something more than friendship that had brought him back to her.

Bertrand, having left the cabriolet, came forward to pay his respects to Denise.

"Bertrand too!" she exclaimed; "he has come back!"

"Yes, and it is to him, whom I accused of deserting me, that I owe my good fortune to-day."

A few words put Denise in possession of the whole story, and she held out her hand to Bertrand, saying:

"Oh! my heart never doubted his! As if one could cease to love a person because he is unfortunate!" Then suddenly remembering that Auguste had recovered a large part of his property, she exclaimed: "Oh! mon Dieu! then I cannot be your wife!"

"Yes, Denise, you will be my wife," said Auguste, taking her hand, "for you are the only woman who could make me happy, and I cannot doubt the sincerity of your love."

"But I am only a village girl——"

"Whom I prefer to all the fine ladies of the city."

"I shall be awkward in society."

"I have learned the worth of society, and I care very little for its judgments; besides, when it knows you, my Denise, it will be compelled to do you justice."

"Oh! I don't want to know it, for my part, my dear; let us agree that, if you marry me, I shall stay here. When you want to go to Paris, you shall go alone; and then, when you are tired of the city, you can come back to your little milkmaid."

Auguste kissed her and they started for the cottage. When one is happy, everything seems delightful; in the eyes of the lovers the cottage had become a palace; but

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Bertrand, who was not in love and who always thought of the future, said to Auguste:

“This house isn’t big enough for you, lieutenant; besides, it belongs to Coco—it’s his property. You must buy a pretty house, not too expensive, which you can see from here, where you will have suitable accommodations and where you can entertain a few friends; because, you know, you mustn’t isolate yourself from society altogether; the sure way to have your love last only a short time is to shut yourself up with your wife for six months. Now that you know the world, you won’t be taken in again. You will take men at their true value; you can associate with the people whose company is agreeable, and you mustn’t play for such high stakes as you used to; for now, or never, is the time to be prudent.”

Auguste approved Bertrand’s suggestion. The house was hired, and a week later, Denise, beaming with love and happiness, embellishing by her charms and her grace the modest costume she had selected, was led to the altar by the man she loved.

All the people of the village assembled to see the little milkmaid married. The peasants said to one another:

“Now’s the time she’s going to play the fine lady! She’s marrying a swell! How high she’ll hold her head!”

But they were mistaken: Denise, after she became Madame Dalville, was as sweet and kindhearted as when she was a simple peasant girl herself.

As he escorted his young wife to their new home, Auguste cast a glance now and then at the comely women whom they happened to pass; but it was a matter of habit simply—Denise alone had his heart.

True to her promise, Denise did not desire to leave the village; and for a long while Auguste did not go away.

from his wife. Later, however, he went occasionally to Paris. On one of his visits to the capital he learned that the vivacious *Athalie* had separated from her husband, because *Mère Thomas* made a second trip to Paris; and that *Monsieur de la Thomassinière*, having made some unfortunate speculations and allowed himself to be ruined by *Monsieur de Cligneval*, had been compelled to turn over all his property to his creditors, and had become a cab-driver—a trade in which he seemed much more in his proper place than when he was in a salon.

The *Marquis de Cligneval*, having ventured to indulge in divers sharper's tricks at *écarté*, which were not to the liking of his adversary, was forced to fight a duel with him, and was killed. As for *Destival*, when he tried to do business in England on the same plan as in Paris, one of his clients, whose money he had appropriated, struck him a blow from which he did not recover.

It was *Monsieur Monin* who supplied *Auguste* with all this news, after asking him how his health was; having applied to his snuff-box, he rejoined *Bichette*, whom he had left with *Monsieur Bisbis* in a clump of shrubbery at the *Café Turc*.

Auguste also saw *Dorfeuil* and his daughter; but he went very rarely to the young linen-draper's, because she was very pretty. By way of compensation he often saw *Virginie*, who was no longer pretty, but who had reformed entirely, and whose warm heart caused her former follies to be forgotten.

When he had passed a short time at Paris, *Auguste* returned to *Montfermeil*, and it was with ever-renewed delight that he found himself once more in the company of his little milkmaid, of *Bertrand*, and of *Coco*, who, as he grew to manhood, often congratulated himself on having broken his bowl.

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